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20 August –
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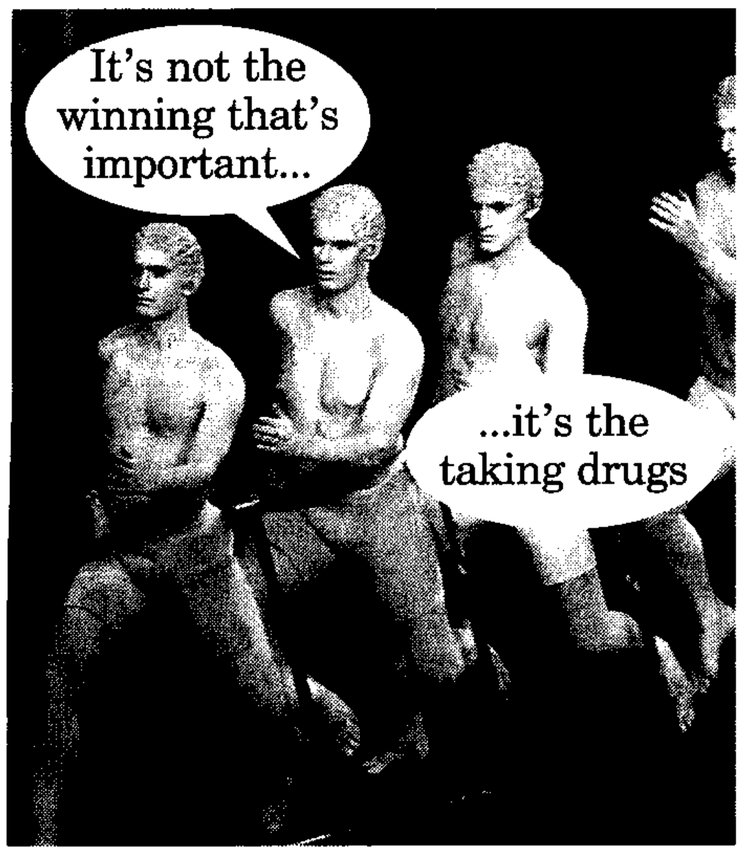
E. Strobes,
pp. Lord Gnome,
The London Olympic Committee
c/o The Hackney Dog Track
E94

SPIRIT OF THE OLYMPICS



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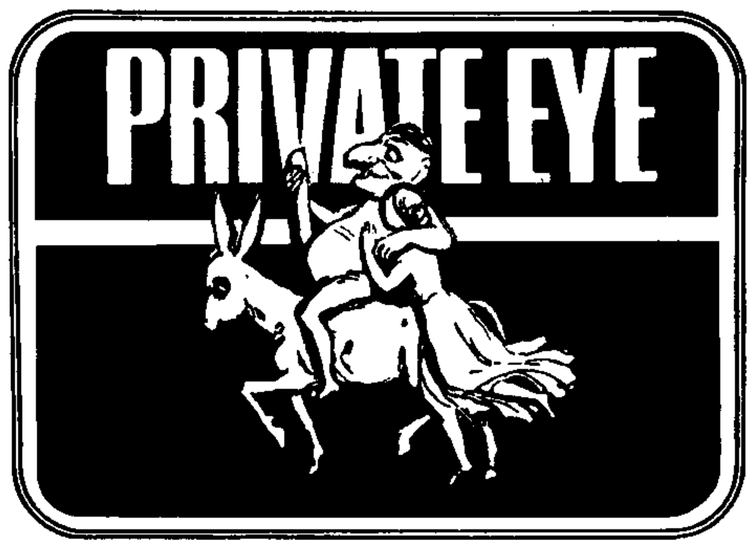

THE mysterious death of business analyst Richard Chang, who fell from the fifth floor of Abbey National's London headquarters last month, has raised a number of potentially embarrassing and possibly expensive questions for both the bank and corporate investigators Kroll Associates...
● *See In the City p29*

WHILE the cat's away on his summer holidays, the political mice will play... But who is Neal Lawson, co-author of the silly season attack on Tony Blair that was all over the newspapers earlier in August?

With a Scottish academic, Professor Paul Thompson, Lawson complained bitterly that "new" Labour was "privatising the public services" and had given in to "the principle of market supremacy". Only if Gordon Brown replaced Tony Blair would the "public sector... be safer from creeping privatisation".

Though readers might have missed it, this was all a bit rich coming from Lawson. For when he's not trying to get selected as a prospective Labour parliamentary candidate (Bridgend Labour party in South Wales declined to shortlist him) he is managing director of the lobbying outfit Lucas Lawson Mendelsohn.

And who does his firm represent? Oddly enough the very businesses who are driving Britain's creeping privatisation the boss so abhors. His clients including Capita, Bechtel – the US giant that owns half the London Underground thanks to the Tube PPP – and PFI friendly accountants KPMG.

"IS IT beyond the wit of the government and the health administrators to deal with the problem... of mixed sex hospital wards?"

So asked an outraged Tony Blair in 1996 when he was leader of the opposition. At the very least, he said, men and women should have separate sleeping accommodation, toilets and wash rooms.

But eight years later – seven of those under his very own government – a study by the mental health charity Mind has found that one in five of those recently admitted to hospital with mental health problems were housed in mixed sex wards. Moreover, this is happening two years *after* the 2002 deadline set up by Labour's own health ministers to end the scandal.

MORE richly deserved good fortune for Lawrence Churchill, new chairman of the Pension Protection Fund (PPF), which was set up by the government to compensate pension scheme members whose employers go down the tubes.

As reported in *Eye* 1107, Churchill is well qualified for the job, having spent much of the 80s and 90s mis-selling private pensions at Allied Dunbar and NatWest Life. Now Baroness Hollis, minister for work and pensions in the Lords, has announced that Churchill and his fellow executives at the PPF will benefit from the Rolls-Royce of pension provision – a so-called "final salary" scheme that requires no contributions and is guaranteed by the taxpayer.

As Tory peer Lord Oakeshott pointed out to the baroness, this is significantly more generous than the schemes whose members, through levies on their funds, will be paying for the PPF and Churchill's comfortable retirement.

Home affairs!

■ Hackwatch surveys the silly season 5
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■ Niger forgeries, Deepcut revisited, nukes, windy thinking & more: In the Back 26-28

USING their actuarial smoke and mirrors, pension consultants Watson Wyatt have estimated that future public sector pension liabilities (mostly for teachers and nurses) stand at £580bn.

The predictable press response to this large-sounding figure has been to bemoan "unsustainable" guaranteed public sector pensions paid out of taxes, while most private sector employees have to rely on funds that are at the mercy of the stock market.

One idea favoured by many is that, in future, public sector staff should also have to invest in funds to buy a pension when they retire. Such pension schemes would be very big and would of course require expert administration of the sort provided, for a suitably large commission, by pension consultants like Watson Wyatt.

PROMISES that "teething problems" with the new student loans computer system would be dealt with in time for the new academic year look increasingly empty. Education chiefs processing applications say "the system's performance was the worst it has ever been".

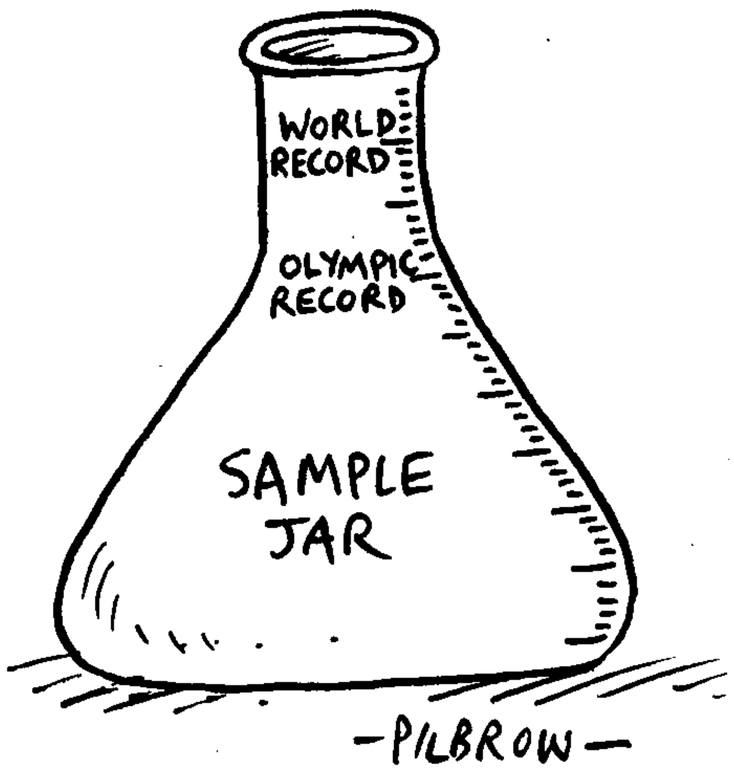
Eye 1111 reported that thousands of students risk being left penniless or in need of emergency payouts in September; but the department for education and skills insisted that problems with software for the Student Loans Company's new PROtoCOL system would be fixed in time for the August rush.

Councils report otherwise, however, saying there has been "little or no improvement" and "it is still extremely slow and unreliable."

A POTENTIALLY lucrative £176m contract to build and maintain nine schools in Scotland has been snatched from troubled construction firm Jarvis at the last minute.

Jarvis had been preferred bidder on the deal in Fife since April, but the council has pulled out of negotiations and reopened talks with two other firms.

The news is a further blow to shareholders, wiping another 5 percent off Jarvis shares. The company only remains in business by the skin of its teeth after winning an eight-month stay of execution from the banks following the announcement in July of annual losses of £246.7m.



Street of Shame

ONE of the most revolutionary changes *Spectator* publisher Kimberly Fortier introduced to the 175-year-old magazine was the introduction of a match-making column, the Love Bug, which promises to introduce gentlemen of distinguished tastes to sensuous graduates for only the price of a £1 per minute voice message.

As her own three-year relationship with gorgeous pouting home secretary David Blunkett demonstrates, it's hardly a service *Spectator* staff need to subscribe to themselves.

Long before associate editor Rod Liddle began availing himself of the full secretarial services at the magazine's Doughty Street offices, the management were worried about a series of press articles which appeared about editor Boris Johnson's friendship with his deputy, Petronella Wyatt. However, Fortier sees herself as a feminist and in 1999 she played a major part in the defenestration of Boris's predecessor Frank Johnson, whose thoughts on the duties of young female staff at the magazine's offices did not tally with her own.

Both Blunkett and Fortier's husband Stephen Quinn should watch their backs, however: despite claiming in the *Independent on Sunday* last September that "I don't think about sex any more, I have a baby at home", the 43-year-old announced to the *Daily Mail* in March that "one of the exciting things about getting older is that some day soon I might acquire a toyboy. When not slinking around hotel rooms, we can go to Wembley Stadium and listen to boy bands."

EARL Spencer's new account of how his great great great great great great great grandfather the Duke of Marlborough's 1704 victory over the French and Bavarians, *Blenheim: Battle for Europe*, has received much publicity thanks to the tireless efforts of his PR agent, Stuart Higgins.

How nice to see that the two men have made up since Spencer famously withdrew Higgins' invitation to his sister Princess Diana's funeral in 1997, pointing out that the then *Sun* editor and his tabloid colleagues had "blood on their hands".

AS THE seventh anniversary of the *Daily Mail*'s post-Diana pledge to ban paparazzi pictures from its pages approaches, editor Paul Dacre last week devoted a whole page to long-distance snaps of Jade Jagger and a topless Kate Moss on a beach in Ibiza, courtesy of master paparazzo Jason Fraser.

On closer inspection, however, Ms Moss's nipples were nowhere to be seen, and in one shot her hand had even been digitally manoeuvred to protect her modesty. How thoughtful of Mr Dacre to be so respectful of her privacy!

FREELANCE Rent-a-Slagg Amanda Platell was happy to put the boot into Faria Alam for the *Daily Mail*, describing how she had "sold the stories of her bedroom escapades for a fortune... She is a calculating madam prepared to flog any detail of her sordid sex life to make a fast buck."

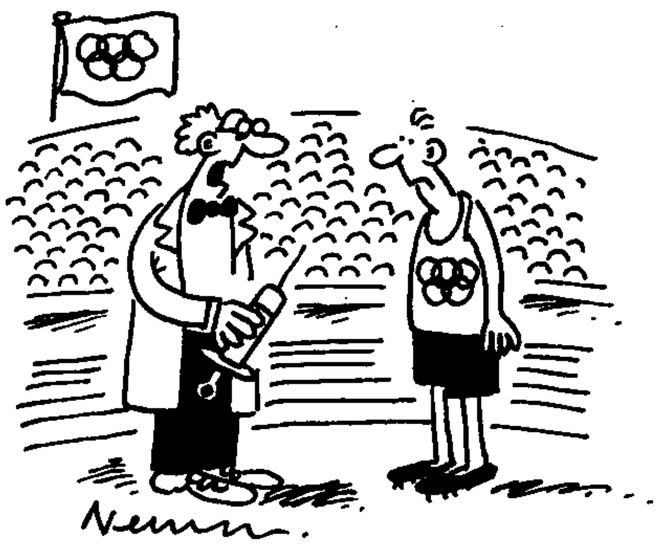
Two days previously, in her regular "View from the Exercise Bike" column for the *Times*, Platell detailed a recent encounter of her own: "Let's just say, in modern parlance, he is a generous lover and performed a certain sex act in a very satisfactory way... I was a little disappointed by Giorgio, he couldn't maintain an erection last night... I consoled him with the tale of how my first husband Stephen couldn't get it up for most of our marriage."

BOSSES at the FA might have been more sceptical about communications director Colin Gibson's ability to play with the big boys if they had read some of his contributions to the *Daily Mail* where he was sports editor before taking up his job at Soho Square.

In April last year Gibson told *Mail* readers that "captain David Beckham will not be sold as a part of Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson's rebuilding programme at Old Trafford." In the ensuing interview with Ferguson, Gibson doused any speculation about a feud between the Man Utd boss and his player and a possible parting of the ways, even though both parties had already made up their minds that Beckham would be leaving. A few weeks later, he was signing for Real Madrid.

RICHARD Desmond's mission to conflate his *Daily Express, Star and OK!* magazine into three differently-designed versions of the same product may have run into problems with journalists (the *Express* sports desk is currently up in arms over his plan to force them to file copy for both papers), but it has given him enough bargaining power to sew up the market when it comes to Z-list celeb stories.

The £200,000 he spent on the two Big Brother contestants who had sex in the house gave him exclusive rights not just to their newspaper and magazine interviews, but also to TV appearances – hence the ubiquitous ads in which the two lovebirds pledged to tell all, "Only in OK!". As a result *Big Brother* itself was contractually obliged not to feature them in the same shot during the post-eviction interviews in the final week of the show – despite being the show that put them together and made them "famous" in the first place!



"We're working on an attendance-enhancing drug"

JUDGING by the exploits of the team of sports hacks sent to cover the Olympic games for the *Observer*, it will be something of a miracle if any news makes it back from Athens at all.

Within hours of arriving last week feature writer Kevin Mitchell had managed to lock himself out of the newspaper's apartment and had to break in, while the following morning his colleague Jamie Jackson disappeared for four hours after getting lost.

The gold medal, however, must go to sports writer Denis Campbell, who was arrested by Greek police after being found wandering in an empty stadium at midnight, despite his protestations that he "was only having a wee look".

***SPECTATOR* TV reviewer James Delingpole used the recent Channel 4 documentary *Secret History: Sink the Belgrano* to take a swipe at Diana Gould, the Gloucestershire housewife who, ancient readers will recall, so famously unsettled Margaret Thatcher on live TV over the issue in 1983.**

In a piece last month entitled *Bleeding Hearts,* Delingpole accused Gould, who opposed the sinking, of "parroting something she'd read in a newspaper, somewhere". He also flippantly dismissed her "instant armchair expertise on the nuances of international law".

Mrs Gould was rather better informed in fact when she challenged the Iron Lady over the sinking during her 1983 re-election campaign. Gould's knowledge stemmed from numerous days of study at the UN library, her work as a naval book officer and a high-standing position within the Belgrano Action Group.

The documentary put forward the case for the controversial sinking and suggested that Britain might otherwise have lost the Falklands war. "Is she now going to appear on TV and say 'Oh, dearie me, I feel such a fool. I now realise that if foreign policy had been dictated by bleeding hearts like me, we would have lost the Falklands,'" Delingpole asks patronisingly.

Housewife Mrs Gould may be, but her ire has been roused. She is not impressed that the nonchalant *Spectator* has yet to even acknowledge her letter of complaint.

A PICTURE tells a thousand stories... and the Sunday papers managed to serve up most of them with the deeply unexciting set of Press Association photos of Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles watching the Mey Highland Games.

The *Independent on Sunday*, which has long since abandoned its founding principles of not printing non-stories about the royals, gushed over a picture of the beaming pair: "Charles and Camilla relax in Caithness."

The two papers which are run on staunchly republican lines by that well-known opponent of the hereditary principle Rupert Murdoch both plumped for a shot in which Ms Parker Bowles appeared to be yawning – "it wasn't quite as fascinating as Camilla expected... boredom seemed to set in" droned Paul Marinko in the *Sunday Times*, while the *News of the World* used the succinct headline "Camilla Parker Bowlezz".

The *Mail on Sunday*, however, knew better, positing in the copy accompanying the same shot that "a touch of hayfever had caught Camilla by surprise"; while the *Sunday Express* had an even more dramatic explanation: "A wasp made a beeline for Camilla's bouquet." Fortunately there is a constitutional precedent for such events, as the paper revealed: "Unlike Prince Philip, who angrily stamped on one two years ago when it buzzed the Queen as she watched the Braemar Games, Camilla almost managed to keep her cool and froze until the wasp flew away.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Boring jobs could encourage the onset of Alzheimer's disease, say doctors."
— *Daily Mail*, 10 August, p5.

"Until he was struck down by Alzheimer's disease, Bernard Levin, who died on Saturday at the age of 75, was one of the most brilliant and prolific journalists of his time... In his heyday he wrote a tongue-lashing column in the *Daily Mail*, where he had also been a theatre critic."
— *Daily Mail*, 10 August, p26.

MOMENTS after being sentenced to two months jail for criminal damage, Neil O'Donnell walked out of Hertford magistrates' court and into a nearby pub because no security staff could be found to take him to prison.

After discovering that there was no one from GLS, part of the Group 4 empire, on hand, court staff asked O'Donnell to sit in the waiting area until someone arrived. But O'Donnell had other ideas about where to wait. He wandered back into the court an hour later having enjoyed a last pint, only to find that police had been combing the streets for him.

Private security firms have lost at least 17 prisoners since April, mainly thanks to a run of escapes from Reliance Security in Scotland. Few bother to come back from the pub so readily.

HACKWATCH

Our survey says...

DUBIOUS pieces of research conducted by companies with a product to plug feature in news pages all year round. But in August, an exclusive *Eye* survey can reveal that they make up more than 40 percent of the contents of all newspapers...

8 August: For once, the *Sunday Express* has some good news on Europe: according to "Fortis Bank, the leading cross-border financial institution", "80 percent of medium-sized European companies feel the economic climate is the same or much better than last year".

That's not to say they could tell you much about their continental neighbours. "Sixty-three per cent of British people said they did not know of any famous person from Germany," reveals the *Sunday Telegraph*, thrillingly. According to a survey by a German tourism lobbying group, "the only name that regularly cropped up was Claudia Schiffer, who lives in Britain."

As for what Germans think about Britain, we'll never know – they're too drunk to say. "Twice as many German drinkers as British – about 17 percent – believe that 'the point of drinking is to get drunk'", according to Mintel research published in the *Sunday Mirror.*

Mind you, as the *Sunday Times* reveals: "A recent survey by Sheraton Hotels reckoned that 23 percent of British people can't sleep unless they have a drink by their bed."

9 August: "Almost half of young Britons now own pirate or counterfeit goods as respect for copyright laws tumbles, according to research by pollsters YouGov to be published today," warns the *Telegraph.*

In fact, so busy are the young shopping for dodgy DVDs that they can't even be bothered to go on gap years any more – that's left to the "two thirds of over-50s" who "would consider travelling the world," as a survey by Saga (a travel company which coincidentally happens to target the over-50s) reveals in the *Telegraph.*

Not that they stay away long! In the *Guardian*, a survey by employment company Reed discloses that "three-quarters of respondents are more likely to take short breaks than they were five years ago," while their rivals Office Angels reckon "the number of people admitting to working while on holiday has doubled since 1999".

Not only that, they don't even get a decent lunch hour – as the *Times* reveals, "a recent survey by the business caterer Eurest revealed that the average lunchbreak for British workers is just 27 minutes." With so little refreshment time during the day, is it surprising that "having a cuppa is top priority when people wake up," according to those "polled by the UKTV Food channel" (the *Mirror.*)

10 August: Stop! We're all paying £23 a week too much for our shopping by opting for famous brands, according to "phone company Tele2 UK" in the *Mirror.* Perhaps it's because those of us who have driven to the supermarket are too tired to make proper decisions – after all, "more than half of motorway motorists drive for more than two hours without a break while 25 percent fail to rest when travelling for four hours or more, says a survey for the Institute of Advanced Motorists and Auto Express magazine", brought to us by *The Guardian* (and that's before they've paid "the highest airport parking charges in the world," as "a survey by the *Daily Mail* has found").

Or maybe we're just really stupid – "more than a third of lecturers consider the academic ability of university students to be worse than it was ten years ago" according to a *Times* survey. But then what would they know? Just a few pages away, the *Times* informs us that "only 8 percent of the 1,000 students surveyed by Opinionpanel Research said that they wanted a job in higher education."

11 August: "Tired of watery soup supplied by surly waiters? Bored with receiving incomprehensible directions to the tower of London?" The tiny percentage of *Financial Times* readers who find themselves in just such a situation are not alone. "A recent survey from Visit London, the official tourist body, found more than six in 10 overseas visitors rated the quality of service in their hotel 'good' or 'excellent'".

Still, at least they're not Italian! For as the *Guardian* reports, "Italian men who have revelled in their reputation as hotblooded Lotharios are no longer the lovers of legend, according to a new study." Yes, a full 87 percent of men aged between 16 and 35 questioned by "a research group on sexual behaviour called Serenella Salomoni" admitted "they lacked the confidence to chat up women", and were "paralysed by the fear of being refused".

Perhaps they should move to Finland, where "a survey carried out by a credit card company examining the number of Olympic medals won by each country and the size of its population has found it is the world's most successful Olympic nation with 14,976 people for each medal won" (the *Guardian* again). At the very least they should consider buying a house there – after all, "three out of four people who don't own a second home would love to have one," according to a survey by the Norwich & Peterborough building society, brought to us by the *Mirror.*

If they want one with a garden, they should head for Northern Ireland, where "nine out of 10 households have at least a patch of greenery to call their own, compared to just a third of homes in Scotland and 51 percent in London" (thanks, the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and the *Mirror).* Then at least they could play outdoors, an opportunity which "an overwhelming number of people, more than 90 percent" believe is not available to young people, according to the Prince's Trust, courtesy of the *Times*, which was busy trying to drive the rest of us outside by informing us of the filthiness of our offices: "One in ten workers cleans their desks, computer keyboards and phones only twice a year according to a poll by Connections, a Manchester recruitment firm".

No such worries for retiree Max Hastings in the *Daily Mail*, who is busy being a SKI - Spending the Kids' Inheritance, since you ask. Yes, our intrepid hero is one of the "45 percent of over-50s who would consider scuba-diving and 20 percent potholing, according to an NOP poll".

Yes, you have to try really hard to come up with a statistic too poor to get printed somewhere in August – but it is not impossible, as PR company Launch discovered with the "SatisTime Index" it devised on behalf of BP Connect petrol stations last week. Despite its impeccable scientific demonstration that "it's official – meeting friends, spending time with family, watching a movie, or going to the gym have all been joined by a new leisure pastime: a trip to the great British forecourt!" and a helpful note attached giving details of the whereabouts of local BP station for the benefit of local paper hacks too lazy to pick up an A-Z, not one single publication in the UK deemed it interesting enough to print.

What they are worth

PR girl sleeping with England captain David Beckham = £800,000

PA sleeping with England coach Sven Goran Eriksson = £360,000

Prostitute sleeping with England striker Wayne Rooney = £140 (per hour)

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Carrying a copy of Ariel is the new red carnation in the buttonhole." — *Ariel.*

"Is Beckham the new Diana?" — *Daily Mail.*

"Is Talinn the new Prague?" — *Newsnight.*

"Iraq is the new Vietnam as pop protest returns to the airwaves" — *Sunday Herald.*

"Giggs: Ronaldo is the new me" — *Sky Sports.*

"Trendscouts at Euro RSGC worldwide say this fall ugly is the new pretty... unpopular is the new popular" — *PR drivel.*

"Is 50 the new 40? Is 60 the new 50?" — *Radio Five Live.*

"Welsh is the new Black" — *Western Mail.*

"Disposing of Property Assets is the new Black" — *Property Review.*

"'No Diet' is the New Diet, reports new research from TNS" — *PR drivel.*

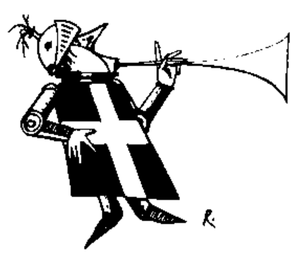
"Frugal is the new Google in Silicon Valley" — *Sunday Herald.*

"Why Red is the new Blonde" — *Daily Mirror.*

"Red is the new Black" — *The Wharf.*

"Liverpool is the new Barcelona" — *Granada Reports.*

EYE TOLD YOU SO



NEWS has finally reached the *Mail on Sunday* that the firm which employs former health secretary Alan Milburn has been awarded a £95m NHS contract by Milburn's closest chum in the cabinet, health minister John Hutton. But it won't surprise *Eye* readers.

In April Milburn accepted a £30,000 job as adviser to Bridgepoint Capital, whose health interests include Alliance Medical. A full six weeks ago the *Eye* made the connection between Hutton's deal with Alliance Medical to privatise scans and Milburn's freedom to lobby government ministers and officials as of June (see *Eye* 1110).

It was only last weekend that the *MoS* belatedly reported on Alliance Medical's new role, quoting Hutton's claims that it will be "a great deal for the NHS and its patients" – not to mention his ex-boss, former flatmate and longtime ally, Mr Milburn.

PS: And top marks to the *Daily Telegraph* of 16 August for its piece about Yorkshire police and their hunt for a stolen painting, *Circle of Palamedes called Stevents*. Knacker put an ad in the *Antiques Trade Gazette* in an attempt to trace the painting, only to see it being offered for sale elsewhere in paper via a London auctioneer. *Eye* readers knew this already because they read the story a fortnight earlier.

"No, I haven't been to all those places but my luggage has"

IN HIS spending review last month chancellor Gordon Brown explained how he aims to cut annual government expenditure by £20bn through a mixture of 84,000 civil service job cuts, reduced admin costs and more efficient procurement. On one major expense, however, Brown was oddly quiet.

The chancellor gave no indication of how much would be cut from government spending on consultants, although there seems to be plenty of room for savings.

A recent survey by the Management Consultancies Association reveals that its members earned £1.3bn from the public sector in 2003, almost twice as much as in 2002. This may explain why in March the MCA elected as its president Lynton Barker, a public sector specialist and former partner in PricewaterhouseCoopers, a major beneficiary of government consultancy contracts.

Barker sits on the government's public services productivity panel alongside treasury chief secretary Paul Boateng, the minister charged with making sure the chancellor's efficiency measures are implemented across Whitehall.

Meanwhile, a tireless campaign of parliamentary questions from Labour MP Jim Cousins has shown that government payments to the big four accountancy firms in the last four years totalled over £110m. The biggest earner, at £41m, was tax avoidance specialist Deloitte. As reported in *Eye* 1111, three of this firm's staff are ensconced in the cabinet office on secondment to the office of public services reform.

The consultants and accountants appear well positioned to make sure that, however swingeing the chancellor's public spending cuts, nobody spoils their nice little earner under "new" Labour.

Lie detector plan worries cabinet

The Guardian

WHILE Peter Mandelson prepares for his new role as the UK's EU commissioner, the trial of his old friends the Hinduja brothers for "cheating" the Indian government has been postponed once again to allow the prosecution lawyers to produce case documents from Switzerland.

The three brothers are accused of receiving £4.5m from Swedish arm company Bofors for persuading the Indian government to buy 410 field guns in a billion-dollar deal in 1986 (*Eyes passim*). The scandal was the focus of the 1989 elections in which Rajiv Gandhi lost power. British citizens Srichand and Gopichand and their brother Prakash, who is a Swiss citizen, could face jail if found guilty.

The brothers continue to deny that money paid into their Swiss bank accounts was commission for brokering the deal. Commissions on defence deals are illegal in India. Chief metropolitan magistrate Reena Singh Nag granted the extra time after the Hindujas challenged the authenticity of copies of documents sent from Switzerland and demanded the originals.

Meanwhile, yet another of the defendants in the case – Martin Ardbo, former president of Bofors – has died. He is the fourth of the defendants to die before the case has been heard, although Rajiv Gandhi and S.K. Bhatnagar were cleared posthumously in February.

The case returns to the Delhi court on 6 September. Perhaps it can be completed while there are still defendants alive.

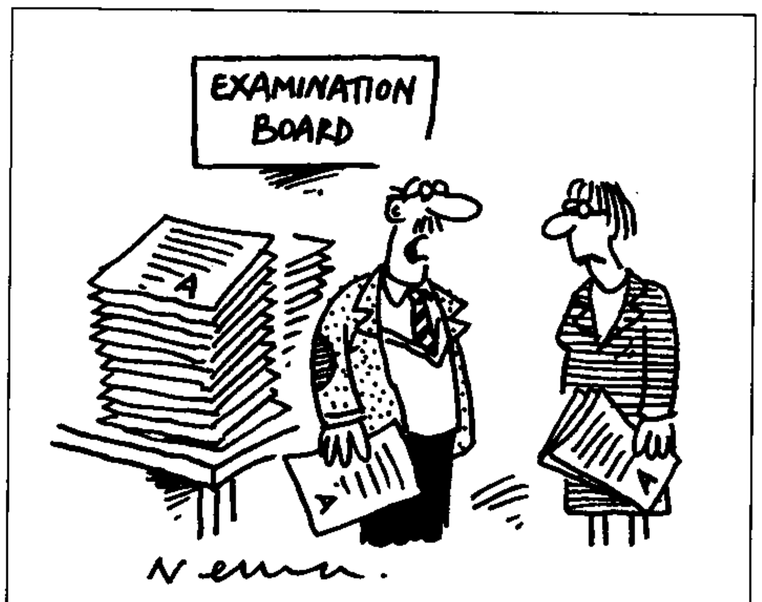
IN THE COURTS

THE shocking appeal court ruling from Lord Justice Laws last week which allows evidence obtained under torture to be used in British courts (and which appears to put the United Kingdom at odds with international law) did not surprise Laws' former colleagues at the Bar.

They say he has never really shaken off the mantle of being senior government treasury counsel. He has always been a believer in that old friend of secrecy, the public interest immunity certificate, and he used them regularly as he cut his anti-terrorism teeth: first when representing the government in its pathetic attempt to stop publication of *Spycatcher*, the well-publicised ramblings of former spook Peter Wright; and again when he represented the government at the inquest into the controversial 1988 shootings of the three unarmed IRA terrorists in Gibraltar, subsequently condemned as unlawful in the European courts.

Elevated to the judicial benches, he was dubbed Mr Justice (lack of) Laws, for endorsing a 180-hour community service order in return for a plea bargain from big city fraudster Roger Levitt. And he gave the go-ahead for Inspector Knacker to appeal against a court ruling to pay compensation to 16-year-old John Wilson, who was beaten up and seriously injured by unidentifiable officers during a riot. The subsequent appeal was so weak that appeal judges threw it out without Wilson's lawyers having to put up an argument.

Human rights groups and lawyers hope the Lords will make equally short shrift of Laws' latest ruling.



"We're the only ones who've failed"

WATERWORLD

SOUTHERN Water bosses searching for somewhere to build a new sewage treatment works near Peacehaven on the south coast were hoist on their own petard when a report they used in a previous planning battle resurfaced.

While trying in 1999 to convince everyone that the only possible option was their preferred plan for a sewage treatment works at nearby Portobello, Southern Water presented a public inquiry with a report which said a site known as Lower Hoddern Farm was "rejected on the grounds that these proposals would have an unacceptable impact upon the landscape, the countryside and adjoining residential properties".

Southern Water lost the planning inquiry and is now planning a £200m sewage treatment plant – at, er, Lower Hoddern Farm.

Dunst and Gyllenhaal, 23, began dating two years ago, when they were introduced by his sister, actress Maggie. The couple later shared a £1million home in Los Angeles and even adopted a German shepherd. *Metro*

TUC NEWS

SHOULD the threat of renewed industrial action by Britain's firemen materialise next month following the collapse of pay talks, the *Daily Mail* and *Torygraph* will no doubt blame spartists in the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) for any chaos or loss of life that ensues.

But the prospective confrontation has in fact been engineered on behalf of the government by ultra Blairites who, as members of the Local Government Association (LGA), sit on the Fire Service National Joint Council (NJC) and are meant to represent the employers.

The 30-strong employers' side of the NJC is made up of 23 members from the English LGA and seven from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Earlier this year, however, the LGA decided not to take up all of its seats and instead agreed to send a leaner, meaner team of nine, making a total of 16 on the NJC.

Late last month it became clear a majority of the employers' side at the pay talks, scheduled for 2 August, were going to vote for a deal with the FBU. This did not go down at all well with "new" Labour supporters in the LGA. First they tried to bully the chairwoman, Christina Jebb, a Lib Dem member of the Staffordshire fire authority, into cancelling the talks. When that failed they tried a bit of arm-twisting to persuade people not to attend, so the meeting would be inquorate. When it was clear that this, too, would fail they tried a new tactic. The LGA decided to drop the "mean & lean" idea and take up all of its seats after all (or as many as they could find at such notice).

The call went out from Julie Grimble, a former Hackney councillor who runs the LGA Labour group office, to find enough stooges to swing the vote. Heading the roll of honour was "Sir" Robin Wales, Blairite mayor of the east London borough of Newham. Wales cajoled three of his council cabinet cronies – Ian Corbett, Andrew Baikie and Christine Bowden – to turn up and vote to reject a deal. This despite the fact that none of the three has ever sat on a fire authority and that Newham council has no role in running London's fire service.

The employers' side duly voted to reject a settlement by 13 votes to 10. Had the three stooges not attended, Jebb, as chair, would have used her casting vote to accept the deal. Instead, the next day she was sacked as chair and accused by Labour members of the LGA, who had scuppered the deal, of not representing the views of the employers' side.

With the government forcing the employers to renege on the pay deal made with the FBU last year, and seemingly intent on prolonging the dispute, who can blame firefighters for believing that Labour's real agenda is to force a showdown which ends in the crushing of the union? The way will then be paved for drastic cuts – fewer stations, fire engines and experienced personnel. Once such "modernisation" is achieved, can privatisation be far behind?

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE European Union's committee of the regions has responded valiantly to complaints in the European parliament that it has done nothing to investigate allegations that its members have been fiddling their expenses and following incorrect purchasing procedures.

Its internal auditor Robert McCoy, who first complained of the irregularities to the committee's secretary-general, Vincenzo Falcone, has seen his permanent job downgraded to that of mere "adviser" on a temporary contract. And since the downgrade, as seems to happen so often in Brussels when awkward questions are asked, McCoy has been away from the office entirely. On sick leave, natch.

DOING THE ROUNDS

Agenda Bender

ONE of the biggest barriers to improving the NHS is holding on to the staff. For many, the working conditions are still dreadful and the pay is crap. Staff turnover costs the taxpayer at least £1.5bn a year, with 15 percent of nurses and 22 percent of allied health professionals leaving each year.

Labour's big idea for sorting this out was Agenda for Change (AFC), the most radical pay overhaul in the history of the NHS. AFC was first tabled in February 1999, but five and a half years later it still isn't beyond the pilot stage and staff at one London trust have pulled out of the deal after fears that up to 40 percent of them could be worse off. Hardly a great incentive for recruitment and retention.

AFC is a key part of the government's NHS Plan, and aims to create a new pay negotiating forum for all NHS staff except doctors and dentists, who are covered by pay review bodies. This would result in a new, "job-evaluated pay structure" for all posts based on equal pay for work of equal value. Once implemented, it should in theory make pay bargaining much simpler; but as usual with "new" Labour's massive and hasty reform programme, the 1.3 million staff expected to vote on whether to accept it in October are largely ignorant of the implications, as are the NHS human resources departments expected to oversee it.

Negotiations with the NHS confederation and the various health service unions and professional groups have been tortuous and splintered. The Royal College of Nursing, which has great difficulty in saying no to anything, came out as an early supporter of AFC in the hope that nursing would be seen as a "highly valued" job and so nurses might do comparatively better than less glamorous non-clinical jobs. However, even the RCN threatened to walk out of the prolonged negotiations until 12 pilots were set up last year to find out if AFC might work.

The results do not look great. The government's initial hope that only 8 percent of staff would be out of pocket was contradicted by pilots in West Lothian where 24 to 33 percent of staff might have their pay downgraded and frozen until 2010; and Guys and St Thomas's in London, where the figure was 30-40 percent. The most recent pilot to report, in Sunderland, found that as many as 37 percent could lose out. There seems to be critical faults in the way staff are being assessed for their "value", with the biggest losers the already lowly-paid but essential admin and clerical staff.

Staff at East London and City mental health trust have now quit from any involvement in preparing for AFC and the East London Unison branch has formally withdrawn its support. Clearly AFC needs a lot more change to make it work; but with an election looming, health secretary John "Oh fuck not health" Reid is likely to try to push it through amid all the confusion.

And even if that fails, Labour is busy bypassing all those tricky public sector negotiations by splitting the NHS up into small chunks and putting all the money-making parts out to private tender. General practice is the latest to be put on the market.

The NHS may end up better for some of those well enough to vote, but it'll be worse for those who aren't and as bad as ever for the staff looking after them in the old-style NHS and pinning their hopes on Agenda for Change.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

WE ARE NOW A BEACON HOSPITAL. IT MEANS WE HAVE ACHIEVED EXCELLENCE IN ONE AREA OF HOSPITAL PRACTICE...
AND ARE NOW A SHINING EXAMPLE TO THE REST OF THE NHS
WHAT IN?
NURSING CARE?
NO, SELLING PHONE CARDS
THIS PLACE IS A DUMP... MUST GO, MY CARD'S RUNNING OUT...

SIGNAL FAILURES

Cherry-o, Beardie

AT LAST the "strategic" rail authority (SRA) has conceded that Britain's rail system can't afford to accommodate Richard Branson's ego. Instead of chucking yet more money into Virgin Cross-Country, the SRA has concluded that the franchise didn't pass "value for money" tests.

Beardie was keen to run trains before rail privatisation. He wanted to cherry pick the most lucrative services, convinced that on-board extras like beauticians, seat-back video screens, hostesses in every carriage and popcorn for the kids would make his trains better than British Rail.

When franchising turned up he had to take an entire group of services or none at all, but he remained a cherry-picker at heart and did his best to isolate his franchises from the rest of the rail network. His business plans for Cross-Country and West Coast presumed all other services would bow to Virgin, which would impose short, frequent trains on infrastructure already congested in places.

Virgin relentlessly raised the prices of normal tickets (valid on Virgin and other franchises), forcing many people to buy Virgin-only book-ahead tickets. By May 1997 (*Eye* 923) Virgin Cross-Country was trying to prevent another train operator starting a new service – on a non-Cross-Country route. Virgin West Coast won official protection from competition on its key routes and services promised in another franchise deal were abandoned. Now Beardie is hoist by his own petard: Cross-Country won't work unless it's an integral part of a wider rail network, not the self-contained entity Virgin tried to make it.

Virgin's costly Cross-Country legacy won't escape treasury hawks, and there's a risk that useful and long-established routes between provincial cities will be broken up and the service between them diminished to save cash. (Already cities as big as Liverpool have been erased from the Cross-Country map to try to make Virgin's service viable.)

The entire operation uses expensive Voyager trains designed for Beardie's disastrous "Operation Cinderella" (*Eyes passim*). Some services need longer trains but two Voyager units attached as an eight-carriage train waste inordinate space on duplicate shops, seat-free safety zones at each end of both units and six toilets big enough for wheelchairs. Why so many spacious toilets, at the expense of legroom, luggage space or seats? Because Beardie planned three classes of seating for marketing purposes (each requiring a wheelchair-friendly toilet), focusing on the trimmings and overlooking the basics again.

Virgin reckons it'll stand a good chance when new bids are invited for Cross-Country. But why should Beardie be trusted when all his previous rail projects (including his Eurostar involvement) haven't delivered the goods? And why would the government even bother to read Virgin's outline bid when only last month it promised that past performance will help decide future franchise awards? Why should Cross-Country be franchised at all, when the government and Network Rail will make all the significant decisions? And why oh why is Virgin deemed to pass "value for money" tests on the West Coast franchise after driving up subsidy and fares (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*)?

MERSEYSIDE bus firm Glenvale is the latest to jump on the bandwagon of bashing light rail (*Eyes passim*). Managing director Dominic Brady says instead of integrating its services with the proposed Merseytram system, it will use its buses – mostly more than 20 years old – in direct competition.

That threat could push up the tram scheme's cost (because of the risk of depleted fares income); or it could help kill off the scheme and deprive Scousers of a clean and modern mode of transport that's taken for granted in many continental cities. But Glenvale was merely singing from the same hymn sheet as "new" Labour, which last month blocked imminent tram schemes and suggested buses were better than railways – ie cheaper to provide.

PS: One reason buses are relatively cheap to provide came to light in May last year when inspectors examined 35 of Glenvale's vehicles. Only four of the 35 were fit to continue without immediate or delayed bans or inspection notices.

'Dr B. Ching'

TV

Nip/Tuck (C4)

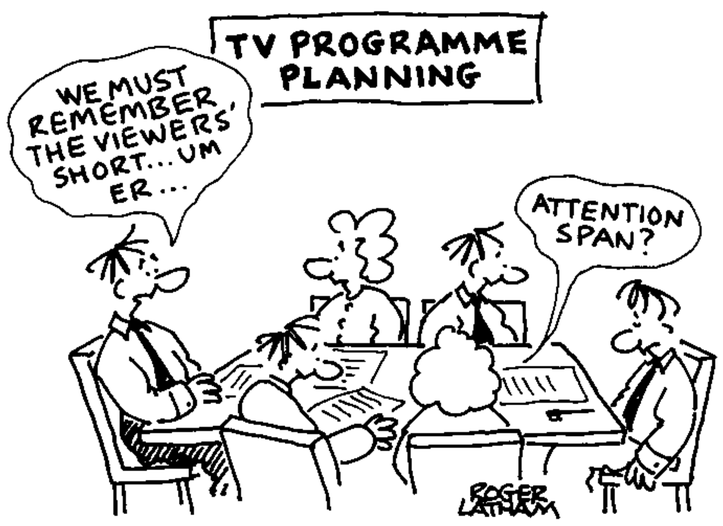
YOU have to feel sorry for TV critics these days. Having grown up watching television that actually meant something, and was sometimes even worth watching, they now flick through the schedules every week and think, what on earth can I review?

Holby City 52 weeks a year? Yet more makeover shows and property shows and property makeover shows? *TV's Naughtiest Blunders* (repeat)? The TV critic's predicament only echoes the wider dissatisfaction of viewers as a whole; but viewers always have the option of going off and doing something else instead – an option that, to the amazement of untalented TV executives everywhere, they appear to be taking up in ever larger numbers. But TV critics are compelled to watch this rubbish. Fancy having to watch *Britain's Most Useless Teenager* or *Greatest TV Kids' Moments* all the way to the end. It's almost cruel.

So it's not wholly surprising that so many critics fall upon American TV shows with almost dribbling enthusiasm. At last, something on which money and talent have been lavished. While the fact remains that we only see the best of American TV, and that they still make too many epsiodes of everything, thus using up ideas with promiscuous speed, you can't argue with the writerly sensibilities of *The Sopranos* or the sheer narrative drive of *24*. You can't overpraise these series, but you can overpraise many others – and TV critics have started to just that.

Was *Friends* really that remarkable? Is *Will And Grace* any more than a very old-fashioned sitcom with gay jokes and great guest stars? Is *Six Feet Under* a little like five similar shows combined, with added funerals? And how do you respond to something like **Nip/Tuck**? For this could be the decider. Like all new American shows this has come heavily trailed, both by Sky One where it was shown earlier this year, and by Channel 4, who aren't proud.

Like many new American shows, we are led to understand, it's bleak, cynical, oh-so-stylish and irresistible in a faintly malevolent way. Its subject, plastic surgery, hasn't been done before. Perfect for Channel 4's mythical core audience of overpaid London media types in their 20s who are too busy ingesting buckets of cocaine ever to watch television.



But it's not; it's not at all. Expensively shot, artfully written, very professionally constructed with that apparently effortless sheen, *Nip/Tuck* is also breathtakingly cynical, profoundly amoral and quite strikingly malevolent. Its two heroes are a very nasty plastic surgeon and a slightly nicer plastic surgeon who is thinking of giving it all up, although it's hard to see how he can as the series is about plastic surgery. Each week they slice up people who do not need to be sliced up, and sail on the big boats they've bought on the proceeds. It's a classic case of cake-and-eat-it: the show sees itself as a devilish satire on the superficiality of American culture, while buying into those values completely.

The result is a series utterly devoid of humanity. It pushes the envelope, as TV people like to say, because it wears its amorality on its sleeve, and takes the bleak, dark tone of shows like *The Shield* one stage further. (Like all current US shows it's savagely underlit, although you can just about see that the nasty surgeon is sporting an unconvincing Shatner-style wig.) And of course it has explicit scenes of surgery, which are lingered over with quasi-pornographic glee. It's almost daring you to vomit. Can you hack it? Can you watch this scene all the way to the end?

The US, as we all know, is a fractured society, built on notions of individualism and their inevitable corollaries: disconnection, self-absorption, fear and loathing. *Nip/Tuck* couldn't have been made anywhere else. Some British critics under 30, still under thrall to notions of cool, have been hugely impressed by it, but the rest of us shouldn't have to pretend. This is a deeply unpleasant programme, without redeeming features, and compared to which even *Britain's Most Useless Teenager* and *Greatest TV Kids' Moments* seem to have their merits.

'Couch Potato'

MEDIA NEWS

"NEWSREADERS ought to be good at speed dating. Summarising a big news story in about as many words as there are in a good chat-up line is a transferable social skill." So says an article in the BBC house mag *Ariel* that reveals much of the philosophy behind the BBC's new approach to news, especially on the comprehensively dumbed down Six.

BBC newsreaders have a presentation coach who ensures that "energy levels" remain high during intros and that transitions from war in Iraq to skateboarding ducks remain tastefully intoned. There's also a gesture coach on hand to make newsreaders more viewer-friendly – and to explain to Fergus Walsh how to look as if he knows what he's talking about. Sadly, there's no room in the piece to mention "content".

"TELEVISION aerials are falling down... taking their place are satellites." So said the *Times* (prop: R Murdoch) in response to Ofcom's communications report, published last week.

The newspaper also reported that for the first time pay TV services were earning more than advertising revenue. Pay TV services like Sky, for example. The article further highlighted "the emergence of personal video recorders that allow viewers of digital television to cut out advertisements." What, like the UK's leading personal video recorder, Sky+?

So that's it... Advertising is dead and Rupert has won. Oddly, however, the *Times* neglected to mention the part of the report that said TV advertising was becoming more popular, or that the number of people who said they liked nothing about TV advertising fell.

FULL marks to VisitBritain, formerly the British Tourist Authority, for its efforts to bring a touch of Hollywood glamour to the island with the "King Arthur Movie Map".

The venture is sponsored by film companies Buena Vista and Touchstone who are anxious to publicise their lacklustre version of the Arthur story which was released last month. Despite devoting almost as many words to "the thrilling action packed adventure of historical grandeur" (sic) as to places like Glastonbury and Stonehenge themselves, the map is carefully-worded to avoid revealing that the film was shot almost entirely in Ireland for tax reasons.

The single British location – a water tank in Pinewood studios which was used for one brief scene – is strangely absent from the map.

CHANNEL HOPPING...

Ken Pyne
ESTHER...
Would Like To Meet...
A CAMERA
BBC
MATCH OF THE DAY
OVERPAID, OVERRATED PERFORMERS WHO WILL TRANSFER ANYWHERE FOR MONEY...
TILL THEY BECOME OVER THE HILL...
AND THEY END UP DROPPING DOWN A FEW DIVISIONS
Des Lynham Radio 5 Live Contract
BUILDINGS OF Britain
IT WAS BUILT ON WHAT WAS THOUGHT SOLID FOUNDATIONS...
A TEMPLE OF PROGRESS, CULTURE & INNOVATION...
Channel 4
BUT NOW THE ROOF'S CAVED IN
SCHEDULES
Big Brother.
my Breasts are too big.
Erotic Tales.
Boys with Breasts.
Wife Swap.
Porn - 4 Play.
Celebrity Place in The Sun.
etc. etc. etc.

GOING LIVE

RED faces at *Channel 4 News* last Thursday when presenter Krishnan Guru-Murthy, following the Football Association bed-hopping saga, told viewers the FA's "crunch" board meeting was taking place at a secret location in central London.

Guru-Murthy went live to Alex Thomson outside FA headquarters in Soho Square "which is as good a place as any!".

"Yes," Thomson chuckled, "I am where the news isn't happening today."

Number crunchings

80 ■ position in Amazon sales chart of ultra-violent computer game Manhunt before it was blamed for the murder of Stefan Pakeerah

8 ■ position in Amazon sales chart of ultra-violent computer game Manhunt 24 hours after it was blamed for the murder of Stefan Pakeerah

AD NAUSEAM

LAST WEEK Wanadoo, the internet service provider formerly known as Freeserve, was bawled-out by the advertising standards authority (ASA) for offering "full-speed broadband for just £17.99 a month". In fact the ad referred to 512kb broadband, when speeds of up to 4Mb are available.

Wanadoo claimed it was trying "to combat some of the confusion in the UK market about what 'broadband' actually means." Further misleading consumers seems an odd way to go about it.

Nevertheless the confusion it is referring to is genuine. It stems from yet another target the government was hoping we'd forgotten: remember Broadband Britain? Come next year, Britain is supposed to have the most competitive broadband market in the G7. Currently, only 11 percent of Britons have broadband access at home, and the roll-out to rural areas has been patchy at best.

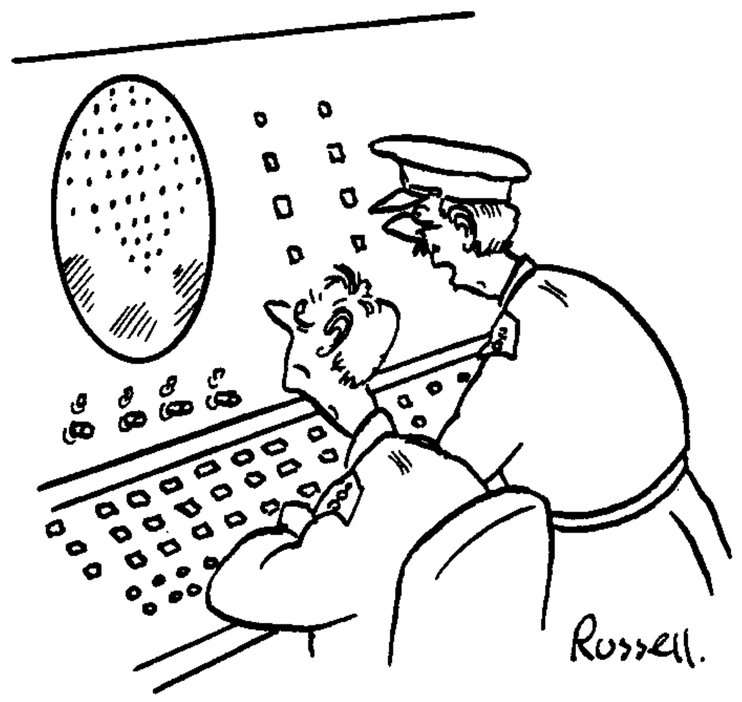
Happily for the advertisers, with the wide-eyed dementia that typified dotcom optimism, the government neglected to define what "broadband" meant. As a result, internet service providers like Wanadoo have happily filled the breach with a spread of half-truths and subtle obfuscation – services as slow as 150kb have been advertised as "broadband", and AOL, Tiscali and BT continue to snipe at each other's broadband ads, while the consumer remains bemused.

FOLLOWING the *Eye*'s repeated suggestion that French Connection has exhausted all possible innuendo with its hackneyed FCUK brand, its advertising suits have found a new way to avoid censure while remaining true to the cheaply risque pun.

Cunning new slogans such as "A word beginning with F" and "Don't make us say it" seem designed to provoke the advertising standards authority (ASA).

The ASA recently ruled that its copy advice team would pre-vet all French Connection promotions after the firm repeatedly flouted ASA guidelines. After 540 complaints over seven years, French Connection has been told repeatedly that its longstanding brand name is unacceptable, but it has confirmed that the infamous FCUK/fuck misinterpretation is only on hiatus.

"French Connection remains absolutely committed to the Fcuk brand, which will continue to be a central part of branding for the foreseeable future," said a spokesman, signally its intention to taunt the ASA for some time to come.



"Well they can't be ours: we haven't got that many planes left"

Warballs

● "From Milan to New York via London and Paris, the glamour glitterati has gone gaga over baby faces — girls who look as if they've just been snatched from the cradle, waifs with Betty Boop eyes, pouty bee-stung lips and creamy skin. But why this sudden infant infatuation? 'It's just the current state of affairs,' says Francisco Anton of Take 2 Model Management. 'We're living in a mad, post-September 11 world, and these girls are a comfort zone.'" – **Elle**.

● "Dylan Lauren, daughter of Ralph, thinks that some of the success of her chain of candy stores — found among the hip boutiques and upmarket malls of big American cities — is down to a post 9/11 need for nostalgia and security. 'Candy can really put you in touch with your memories,' she says." – **Elle**.

"A Winnipeg body piercer plans to stick 3,000 surgical needles into his body to commemorate the people who died in the terrorist attacks of Sept 11, 2001. Four people will start sticking the needles in Brent Moffatt, 36, at the moment the first jetliner hit the World Trade Centre's north tower." — **Montreal Gazette.**

"The future of Scotland's traditional Highland Games, including landmark events such as the Braemar gathering, is under threat from insurance premiums that have soared since the September 11 attacks." — **Glasgow Herald.**

DUMB BRITAIN

BBC Radio Norfolk

Stewart White: Who had a worldwide hit with the song *What A Wonderful World*?

Contestant: I don't know.

White: Okay, I'll give you a couple of clues. What do you call the part of your body between your hand and your elbow?

Contestant: The arm.

White: Correct! And if you aren't weak, you are...?

Contestant: Strong.

White: Correct. And a final clue: what was Lord Mountbatten's first name?

Contestant: Louis.

White: Well there we are then. So who did have a worldwide hit with the song *What A Wonderful World*?

Contestant: Frank Sinatra?

The Weakest Link, BBC

Anne Robinson: The cultivation of which fruit is known as viniculture?

Contestant: Potatoes.

Bush urges use of condoms based on Uganda experience

Taipei Times

POLICE 5

THE police service of Northern Ireland has been flicking through the statutes to find a way to deal with non-violent troublemakers (rioters, of course, are generally ignored even when their faces can be seen in TV footage).

During George Bush's brief stopover at Hillsborough Castle last year, anti-war protesters carried out a routine demo in Belfast city centre. Though they were miles from the US president, the police used unusual force and last week five people (belatedly) appeared before Belfast magistrates.

They had been lifted on charges of little-known offences including "obstructive sitting" and "malicious sitting" in a public place. However, all charges were withdrawn after defendants agreed to be bound over to keep the peace for a year. Outside court Green party spokesman John Wright noted that "for peace protesters to be bound over to keep the peace is like asking a bear to take honey, this is a victory for us".

No one has yet worked out how much this prosecution cost the taxpayer. But at least it kept the police off the streets for a while.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

HUGE SUNGLASSES ARE SOOO IN!!!
AGENCY
DO THEY TAKE AWAY A LOT OF BRIGHTNESS?
NO, I WAS PRETTY THICK BEFORE I STARTED WEARING THEM!

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

BORE WAR

OVER the past five years the streets around London's Euston station have been the scene of some vicious fights between teenage Bangladeshi gangs. Up to 100 youths have attacked one another and police with hammers, meat cleavers, petrol bombs and scaffolding poles. On new year's day 2003, one boy was left brain-damaged.

Following peace talks led by community leaders and Inspector Knacker, calm reigned for nine months until this summer. Camden council decided the peace should be celebrated, so on 22 July the Labour council's bigwigs joined community workers, police officers and gang members for an awards ceremony in the council chamber.

Alas, "new" Labour's idea of showing the yoof a good time was not the same as their young guests'.

The ceremony — snappily titled "Community Cohesion Projects, Intra Ethnic conflict / Camden United" — was scheduled to consist of nearly two hours of speeches before certificates were handed out. First up was council executive member Theo Blackwell, who delivered a lecture about "the context for the local and national community cohesion agenda". Blackwell was followed by Cllr Nasim Ali, who spoke of "barriers and challenges facing young people in Camden". Next came Cllr Anna Stewart, whose subject was "community safety and youth conflict".

And so drearily on for more than an hour, until attention wandered and the gang members began amusing themselves... by trading insults. A scuffle between two youths was the cue for a full-scale brawl with fists, chairs and bottles. Shocked councillors' appeals for calm were ignored and only the muscular intervention of Knacker restored order.

When the dust settled Cllr Ali told the *Camden New Journal*: "Maybe there could have been fewer speeches, but we councillors have to sit through three-hour meetings and it doesn't end up with fighting."

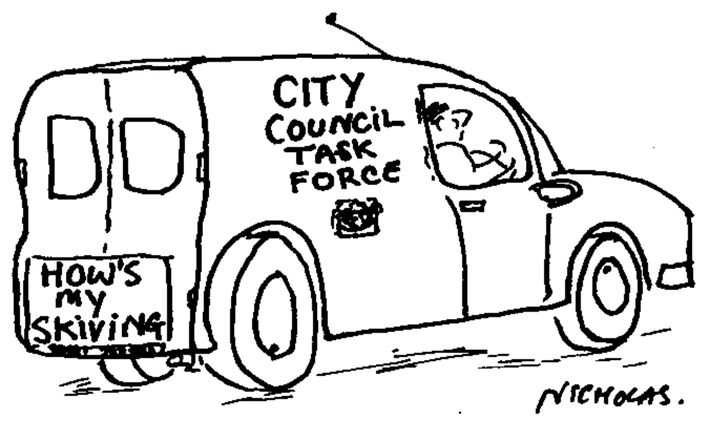
QUALITY OF MERSEY

WHEN Delamere House, a residential home for the elderly in St Helens, Merseyside, was closed by its owners, Southern Cross Healthcare, in May 2003, its 26 residents were dispersed to other old folks' homes against their will. Eight months later 10 of them were dead. So striking was the mortality rate that the Cheshire coroner, Nicholas Rheinberg, has demanded a police investigation.

Before the closure the residents' relatives had taken St Helens council to the high court, with the help of solicitor Yvonne Hossack (*Eyes passim*). They argued that the council's failure to stump up the relatively small amount of money per resident that could have kept the home open was a breach of the oldies' human rights. Psychiatrist Professor David Jolley told the court that sending frail old people to live among strangers in unfamiliar surroundings was likely to cause them to die much earlier than they might otherwise have done. But the judge ruled against the residents, the home closed, and Prof Jolley was proved right.

Few of the deceased residents' families are likely to be readers of the *Municipal Journal*, a local government mag. Last month the *MJ* produced a glossy supplement celebrating the winners of its annual local government "achievement awards", presented at the Savoy by TV's John Sergeant. Winners of the "housing achievement of the year" award was St Helens council which, the judges said, "showed how in breaking the mould and taking a fresh look at design and funding options, it directly helped improve the quality of life for its elderly tenants".

● **A NEW category in the 2004 Rotten Boroughs Awards will be Tory Bigot of the Year (Tboy). Despite Michael Howard's attempt to present a "gentler" face of the Conservative party, it is reassuring to know that, at grass roots, the party's members cherish traditional values. Salt-of-the-earth types such as Keith Mayers-Hewitt, chairman of Bury St Edmunds Conservative Association and town councillor for Stowmarket south ward, who on entering Stowmarket library and seeing some Asian men sitting at computers quipped to the librarian: "Have aliens landed or is it an invasion of darkies?" More Tboys next time!**



WHISTLEBLOWERS BEWARE

THE good news for whistleblowing former Flintshire county council auditor Andy Sutton (*Eyes passim*) was that, after a five-year battle against his former employer, he was awarded more than £112,000 by an employment tribunal at the end of July. The bad news was that the tribunal, in Shrewsbury, refused to award Sutton a penny of his legal costs. As they will amount to more than £100,000, this has put something of a dampener on his triumph. The Labour council faces a bill of £250,000-plus.

Tribunal chairman Guy Pritchard appeared to have decided the trouble with Sutton's case against Flintshire – which exposed 37 instances of dodgy financial practices – was that it was too thorough. "The applicant's case has been put with great vigour," said Pritchard in his ruling. "He has pursued not only the case but pursued Flintshire for the failings he sees, and beyond the point where it has benefited him or anyone else."

Sutton concludes that the implications for other potential local authority whistleblowers who might wish to expose wrongdoing under the public interest disclosure act are worrying: "The message seems to be [that] you keep your mouth shut, because this is what will happen to you."

BLASTED HEATH

FOLLOWING the audit commission's criticism last year of "widespread and persistent bullying" at Torridge district council in north Devon, followed by an independent inquiry report which spoke of "unhappy" working relationships and "inappropriate behaviour" (*Eye* 1095), a new culture of "openness and honesty" was promised.

Alas there are still few happy bunnies in Bideford. Seven senior officers have departed in recent months, including chief executive Trevor Smale. His departure with a "substantial" sum was agreed in a closed session of the council at the end of July.

Torridge has now brought in one Roger Heath as acting chief executive to sort the mess out. Mr Heath knows a thing or two about secrecy and huge payoffs. As *Eye* 1075 reported, as chief executive of East Northamptonshire district council in 1999 it was Heath's decision to prosecute publican Geoff Monks over dubious allegations that mouldy ham had been found in his kitchen. Monks ended up with record fines and costs of almost £30,000 for a first offence, lost his three pubs and ended up serving eight weeks in jail because he was unable to pay his fines. Monks alleged that he had been stitched up and persuaded the district auditor to investigate. The DA's report has never been made public. On 18 December 2000, however, the council's ruling Tories agreed an early retirement package for Roger Heath "in the interest of the efficient exercise of the council's functions".

Heath's pension was massively boosted by the allegedly legal device of "adding" 27 years to his service — from 13 years to 40. The exact value of Heath's package has never been revealed, but opposition councillors estimate that his departure, and that of his shortlived successor, appointed from within the council without the job being advertised, have cost ENDC in the region of £880,000 so far. Nice work!

● **"UNFORTUNATELY we can't respond via email, as our computer system is unable to process emails."** — *Email from Westminster council parking department in response to email from resident.*

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

THE entire board of governors of a Warwickshire high school has been sacked after school inspectors concluded that they were far too pally with the school's failing teachers.

Ofsted inspectors visited Hartshill School, in Nuneaton, Warwickshire, earlier this year and were horrified by what they found. "This is a poor school achieving poor value for money," they declared. They had serious criticisms of teaching in several areas, and have put the school on special measures. However, it was the school's governing body on which they really poured scorn.

"Within the governing body there are key members, including an ex-teacher from the school, that are friends with a number of current teaching staff and this makes tough decisions regarding staffing issues difficult to carry out," concluded the report, which praised long-suffering headmaster Richard Turner for his determination, despite the abject lack of support from the governors.

Education secretary Charles Clarke has rarely used the power to get rid of an entire governing body since he was granted it two years ago.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

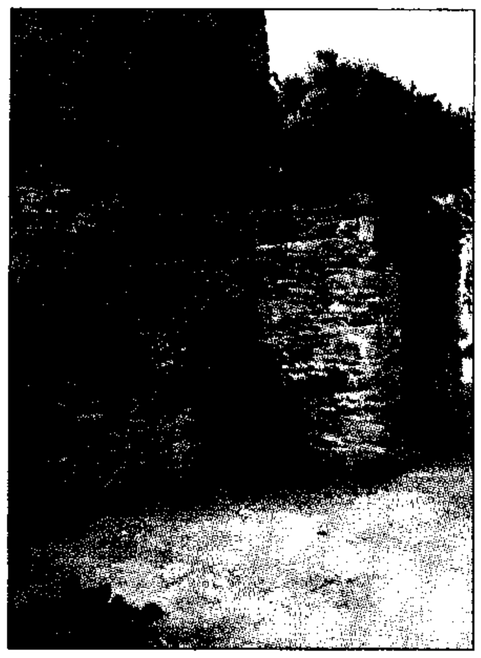
KNIFE & PACKER

WE'RE HANDING IN OUR MEMBERSHIP CARD, JEAN-LUC; AS A PROTEST AGAINST THE DEGRADING FILTH YOU'RE NOW STOCKING
JUST IN! "Tales of Jim Dimechan's cat!"
POTEMKIN'S VIDEO RENTAL
WE REALLY DIDN'T EXPECT TO FIND THIS KIND OF REPUGNANT MUCK ON YOUR SHELVES
IT CAN'T BE, GUYS! WHAT DID YOU FIND? PORN? SNUFF? W-W-W-WHAT HAVE YOU GOT THERE?
MUCH WORSE THAN THAT. WE FOUND A 'SUMMER BLOCKBUSTER" IN YOUR CINÉMA VERITÉ SECTION
"PEARL HARBOR"... SICKENING
POTEMKIN'S VIDEO RENTAL

NOOKS and CORNERS

AT Godminster near Redlynch, just south of Bruton in Somerset, is a charming collection of houses, old farm buildings and barns on what was once a unified estate. The planning department of South Somerset district council keeps a close watch on all these buildings; but it seems to have strangely divergent policies towards the different owners.

Godminster Manor is a large, rambling farmhouse – listed at grade two – parts of which date from the 15th century and with a later grand west front added in c.1700. In 1993 the house was given as a wedding present to Richard Hollingbery, a scion of the family which ran Comet stores until bought out by Kingfisher plc in 1984. Mr Hollingbery operates as, among other things, an organic farmer, specialising in cheese; and since he acquired Godminster Manor he has made considerable alterations to the house, adding new wings and inserting dormer windows in the roof space.



FLOWER POTTY: The toolshed and plants that annoyed the council

In the 15 or so applications for planning permission and listed building consent for these, all approved by the council, the assumption has been that the house remains in residential use. However, a memo dated 21 August 2000 from the council's technical manager to the planning manager refers to "Proposal: Formation of conference facilities, partial re-construction works and extension ancillary accommodation." Yet no application has been made for a change of use at Godminster Manor from residential to a conference centre. (The memo also states that "No inspections of this development will be made by Building Control Staff." Why not?)

Rather less helpful is the attitude of South Somerset district council to the owners of the Lower Barn at Redlynch, where a path from the manor meets the public road. Here, Philippa and John Rees have, over 22 years, adapted and converted the barns to make a place "to welcome artists in any discipline who want an attractive non-institutional setting in which to work, to teach, perform, rehearse or record".

Recently this has been done in the teeth of opposition from the district council. Permission to convert one barn into a residence was only granted on appeal in 1998 – one objector being Kevin Price, project manager of Minster Projects Ltd, the firm doing all the work for Mr Hollingbery at Godminster Manor.

Subsequently, the council even bothered to oppose the placing and watering of plants on the roof of a new toolshed built by Mrs Rees (planning permission again only given after appeal). The vindictive pettiness of the local authority is also shown by its ponderous attempt last June to close a temporary, week-long selling exhibition of oriental rugs and artefacts at the Barns at Redlynch – something beyond its competence which does not require planning permission.

So why can wealthy Mr and Mrs Hollingbery apparently do no wrong while Mr and Mrs Rees, mere retired teachers, can do no right? Perhaps the answer lies in the sale of the estate land by the Earl of Ilchester in 1912, for all subsequent owners retain rights over roads and paths. In particular this applies to a right of way which passes by Godminster Manor, a path which is affected by a current proposal to construct a new wall and circular drive to the west of the house.

Mr Hollingbery has now asked that these title successors desist from exercising rights of way over his land (and, as it happens, he has blocked footpaths referred to in the 1912 conveyance including those in Godminster Wood where game is being cultivated for shooting parties).

None of this would really matter if Lower Farm were not in separate ownership, which must be irritating, especially when it is so strategically placed as to make an ideal entrance and reception area were Godminster Manor ever to become a conference centre. But of course for now it isn't a conference centre, for that would require a change of use to be granted by South Somerset district council. And there is no reason to suppose it would look favourably on that… is there?

ANOTHER dubious case in Somerset concerns St Mary's Parish Church at Wedmore, where a proposal to glaze in the south porch facing the main village street has been approved by Sedgemoor district council despite opposition of the parish council, Somerset county council and English Heritage.

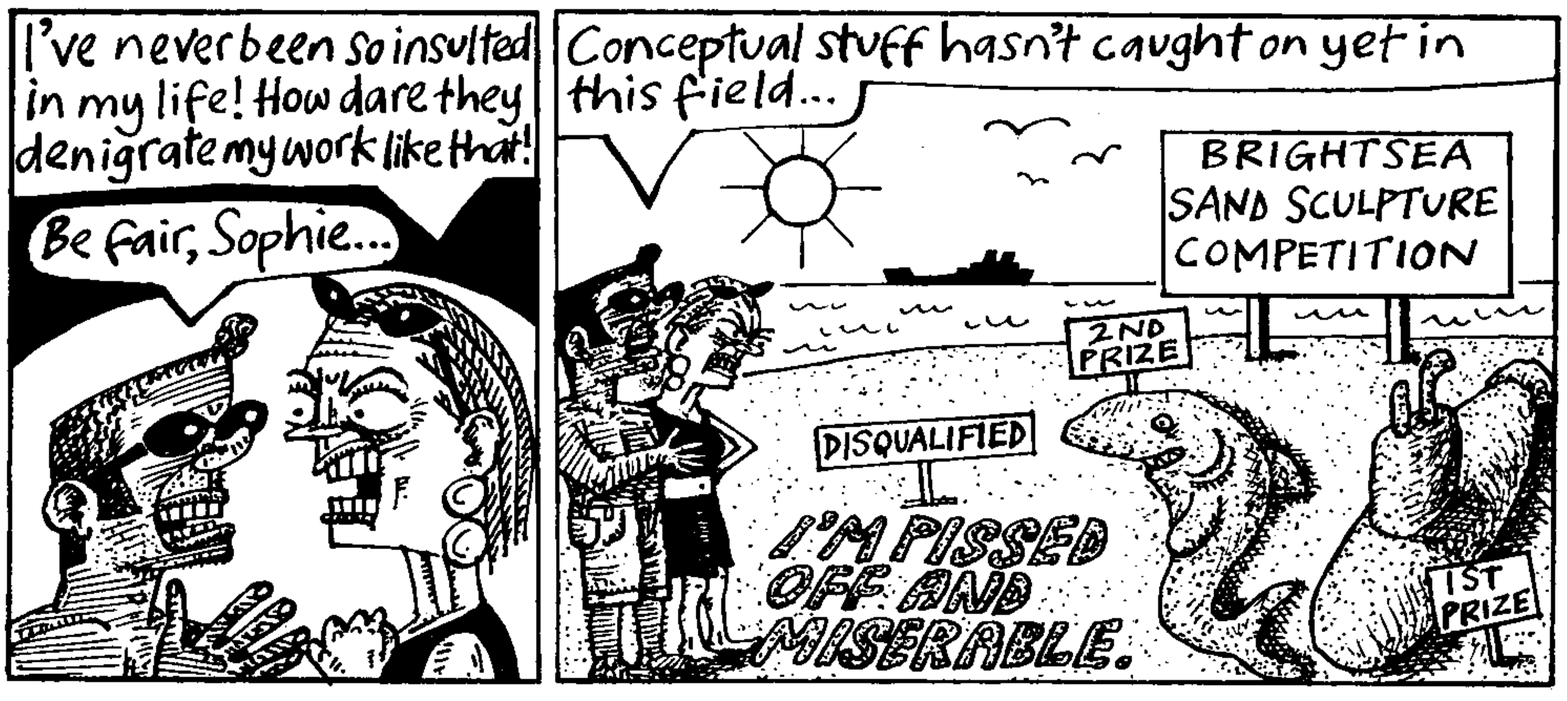
As a glass screen across the open porch of a great medieval church will look both hideous and alien, there must be pressing reasons for it. They are that some parishioners suspected that local youths were gathering in the porch to do wicked things, like drinking and taking drugs.

As there is nothing else to do in the village, perhaps the practical use of this porch could be regarded as outreach by the church. But why are glass doors necessary? After all, there is nothing new about people causing a nuisance in a church porch and the obvious solution has always been to install open iron gates. But I suppose that would be too traditional and sensible for the go-ahead vicar of Wedmore and his allies on the district council.

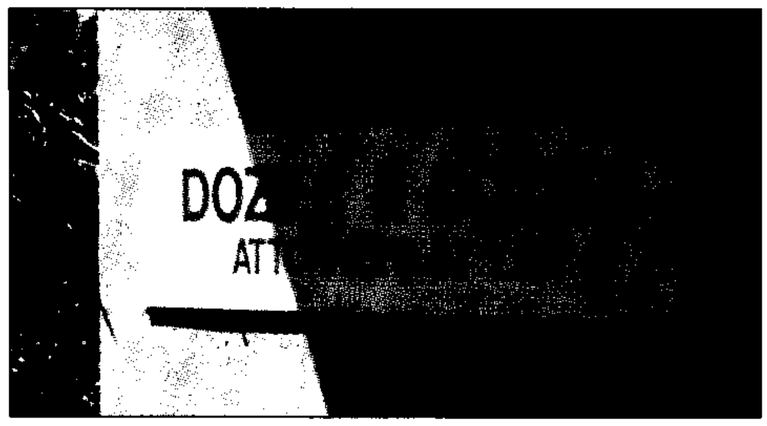
'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


I've never been so insulted in my life! How dare they denigrate my work like that!
Be fair, Sophie...
Conceptual stuff hasn't caught on yet in this field...
BRIGHTSEA SAND SCULPTURE COMPETITION
2ND PRIZE
DISQUALIFIED
I'M PISSED OFF AND MISERABLE.
1ST PRIZE

I-SPY *Sarasota, Florida*



Submitted by Rob Reith. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

CLASSICAL CD companies have had a tough time in recent years with falling sales, rising costs and signs among the steaming entrails that the end is nigh. But the end has come two steps nearer following a decision in the high court that now extends their liability for copyright payments into the realms of silliness.

One of the few vaguely viable areas of the record market has been early music, where performance is like archaeology: old scores are found in dusty archives and need scholarly attention – editing – before they're fit for the microphone.

Hyperion's recent disc of motets by the 18th century composer Michel de Lalande was a case in point. The company engaged somebody called Dr Lionel Sawkins to sort out the scores, for which he was paid an appropriate sum, and everything was set up for the project to go into the studio. Then, just before recording, Hyperion received a surprise communication from Sawkins' lawyers claiming his work on the scores had given him copyright, and demanding a licence fee. Hyperion, reasonably it seemed, told Sawkins to take a running jump and proceeded with the recording, which would have been too expensive to cancel.

Time passed and nothing happened until Hyperion released the disc – at which point Sawkins sued the company. No one thought he would win. He wasn't a composer and he hadn't added anything of significance to the scores. He had merely applied scholarly expertise to already existing music to make it performable; and according to the Music Publishers' Association guidelines, which are generally observed in the industry, this doesn't give him rights of authorship. But Mr Justice Patten begged to differ and, to the horror of the classical CD world, found for Sawkins.

Left with a big legal bill and a damaging precedent, Hyperion has lodged an appeal and is gathering support from other CD companies to help pay for it. It as also been quick to withdraw the Lalande disc from distribution, making the point that even without liability for copyright it had cost more to produce than it was ever likely to recoup on sales.

So Sawkins' victory is pyrrhic: he will get no future royalties. But everyone loses here, not least the world of early music scholarship which one would have thought would be concerned to give obscure composers like Lalande every chance of exposure. One can only hope the appeal court agrees.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

DEVIZES Festival 2004 got under way on Turdsday as the friends of the festival get a preview of the Festival Art Exhibition at the Wine Street Gallery.

Devizes News

DOWN ON THE FARM

"SUGAR, Mr Speaker" was said to be the young Disraeli's first attempt to address the Commons, on some long-forgotten row over the price of what was then Britain's most costly import. His intervention prompted a howl of derision from fellow MPs, who would soon be crowding in to hear him as a leading orator of the day. Similar feats of oratory might be required to do justice to the latest manifestation of sugar's power to make some rich while keeping others in poverty.

On 4 August the World Trade Organisation delivered a crushing verdict on a case brought before it concerning the illegal dumping of millions of tons of cut-price sugar on the world market by the EU. The EU is still dumping up to 5 million tons of sugar a year on the outside world, in flagrant breach of its agreement under the "Uruguay round" to restrict exports to one million tons.

This may sound innocuous until one looks at the damage it does to all those sugar-growing countries outside the EU which produce their sugar without subsidies. They see the world sugar price going through the floor, thanks to the rock-bottom prices EU countries can afford to charge because they have already made their profit out of huge subsidies from EU taxpayers.

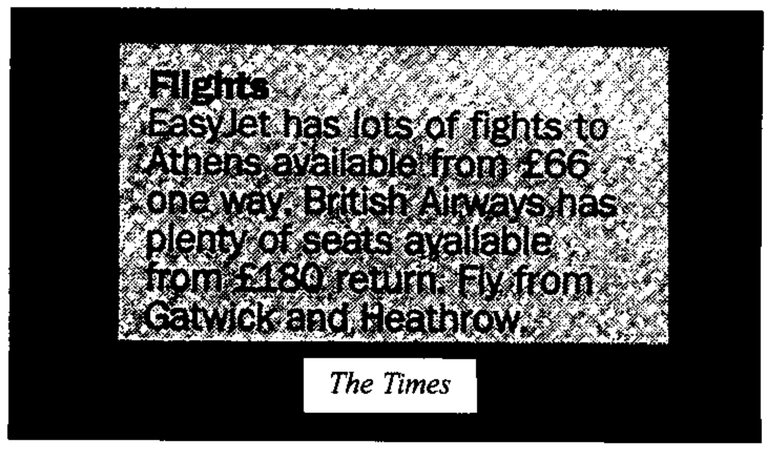
According to Oxfam, the effect of this flood of illegal EU exports has been to slash world prices by 23 percent. In 2002 this led to exchange losses of $494m to Brazil, $151m to Thailand and $60m each to India and South Africa: £400m stripped from the economies of these countries alone, quite apart from losses to other sugar-producing nations, mostly poor enough already.

Where this becomes an even greater scandal, however, lies in just why the EU is breaking international rules in this way. Easily the EU's biggest sugar exporter is France, which produces 5 million tons a year from sugar beet, but only consumes 2 million tons. Three million tons is therefore over-produced, to be dumped on the world market. In addition France imports 1.6 million tons of cane sugar, mainly from its overseas territories in the West Indies which, because they are technically part of the EU, receive massive EU subsidies. This too is then re-exported, to add to the miseries of the Third World and the enrichment of France, which is thus responsible for almost all the EU's export surplus.

This problem came up before in 2001 when France's answer to cutting illegal exports was that there should be savage reductions in EU quotas for countries like Britain, so that France could export her surplus inside the EU instead. Now the WTO has again confirmed that France's exports are illegal – sorry, the EU's – some version of this plan will doubtless be revived. As it happens, uniquely in the EU, Britain already makes a major contribution to helping Third World producers by importing half her 3 million ton sugar consumption, unsubsidised, from the canefields of her former West Indian colonies. The other half comes from home-produced beet sugar, which, unlike France, the UK only produces to the limit of her EU quota.

Any cut in quotas would have a devastating effect on the 7,000 UK farmers who grow the stuff. But since EU trade policy is dictated by France, it is unlikely Brussels will worry too much if a few thousand of those UK farmers have to diversify into something else. The CAP, after all, has only ever had one real purpose – to protect the farmers of France.

'Muckspreader'


Flights
easyJet has lots of flights to Athens available from £66 one way. British Airways has plenty of seats available from £180 return. Fly from Gatwick and Heathrow.
The Times

Letters

Private Eye

Curfew what a scorcher

Sir,

As much as I appreciate Private Eye's representation of the down-beaten/dispossessed etc, there is usually more than one side to any story. I work next to a major store and frequently observe the often violent detention of certain youths who do not see the need to pay for such goods as CDs, DVDs, etc. The subsequent cost of the security goes on all our shopping bills.

At our request our council has been employing, what you refer to, as policing-on-the-cheap. Of late we have even had some real policemen. Such simple measures have had quite outstanding results. Our partially-sighted porter now gets some protection from being beaten up by drunken louts. Disabled church goers across the road are now less likely to get mugged. Women shoppers no longer have to run the gauntlet of threats and abuse from aggressive beggars.

Using David Blunket's "controversial" act, we have had the illegal car-breaking yard shifted off the local estate, several crack houses closed down (and importantly kept closed) and the mere threat of an ASBO quietened down a quarrelsome neighbour and his two destructive offspring. To describe the CSOs conduct as a "draconian over-reaction" for merely lecturing two boys and giving them a leaflet is an over-reaction itself.

Legislation like David Blunkett's is at last giving decent people some measure of power to improve their areas and thus bring back some sense of civilisation.

Of course Private Eye does not print any of the above as this does not fit with the sensitivities of middle-class lefties. But then middle-class lefties do not live were I do.

Recently you ran an article concerning the break-down of conduct in schools. I did not need to be informed of this as pupils at our own local schools have been known to form into ethnic gangs and go at each other with baseball bats and CS gas. It surprises me that you can't see the incongruity of that article and the one on the community support officers.

Yours sincerely,
MARK TORRICE,

London E10.

Foot in mouth

Sir,

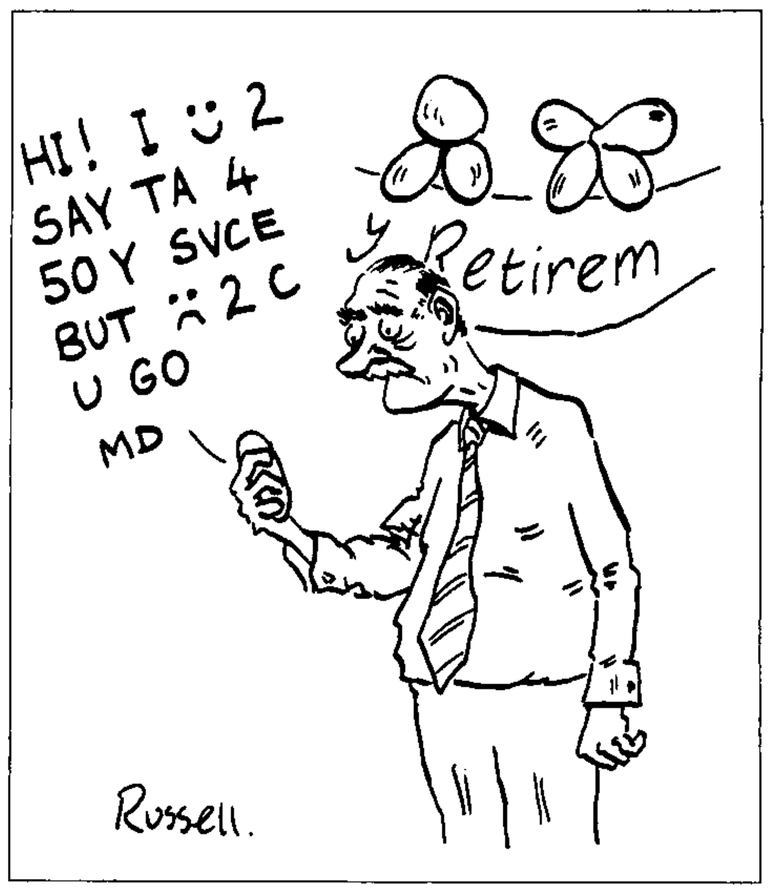
The values held dear by Francis Bennion (Letters, 1112) and derided by [Paul] Foot were not just those of lawyers like Bennion; they were those of our civilisation itself, empiricism and open-mindedness.

Foot campaigned for the vindication of one Hanratty, hanged for murder 40 years ago. A scientist pointed out that there was enough resemblance between the murderer's DNA extracted from semen at the crime-scene and that of Hanratty's surviving relatives to suggest that it would be interesting to exhume Hanratty's body.

So it proved. To Foot this was "scientists desperately trying to prove that they are right". Actually "I am right" is alien to the mind-set of scientists, who let the facts speak for themselves and venture opinions only on questions about where further facts might be sought. Foot, with his pre-Enlightenment religious fervour never grasped this.

Yours faithfully,
PHILIP ROE,

Via email



Respect

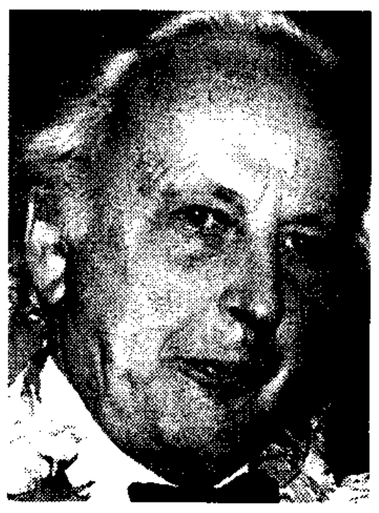
Sir,

The "thousand or so electors of Leicester South" who voted for Respect's Yvonne Ridley were actually 3,724: she got the biggest minor party vote in a by-election for 28 years. Maybe you missed the figures because most of the press, including the Times, didn't bother their backsides printing them – probably because of the size of Ridley's vote, and its undoubted contribution to Labour losing the seat. When the left does badly in an election – Paul Foot's 377 votes in Stechford [Birmingham], for example – the media sneer, even in an obituary; when it does well – and 3,724 would qualify – they lie about it, or simply ignore it. Thank you so much for joining the pack, when you should be awarding credit where due.

Yours sincerely,
LES RAPHAEL,

Kilmarnock.

Lookalike



Carter

Worsthorne

Sir,

I'm sure your readers will have noticed, as have I, the startling resemblance between the socially ambitious Vanity Fair editor Graydon E. Carter and Tory sage Peregrine Worsthorne. Are their hairdressers perhaps related?

ENA B. MADEUPNAME,

London.

Kilroy comeback

Sir,

Mr Kilroy-Silk resigned as a Labour MP, because he was sick of the cretinous crypto-Communists within that party, in 1986.

That doesn't make him a "failed Westminster MP" (Eye 1112).

The next time he ran for election he was, er, elected. That shurely makes him something of an astute politician, don't you think?

Yours faithfully,
C.A. SAUNDERS,

Altrincham, Cheshire.

Bad Day at the office

Sir,

Re: Biggles Fills His Pockets (1112). It doesn't surprise me that Sir John Day is taking advantage of the revolving doors available to high-ranking military personnel. But it is interesting to speculate as to why he is so favoured.

May it be something to do with the Mull of Kintyre Chinook helicopter crash? It is ten years since the pilots of the Chinook were posthumously found guilty by this same Day of "gross negligence", at the same time ignoring the findings of a board of inquiry that had not reached such a conclusion. Day went against established RAF protocol, which normally never blamed dead pilots. For the families and friends of flight lieutenants Jonathan Tapper and Richard Cook, along with many service personnel, his pronouncement was a major injustice.

The reason Day said this was because he was not about to admit that the RAF's biggest peacetime loss of life had been caused by using an aircraft that was unfit to fly.

I count myself privileged to have been an acquaintance of one of the pilots. I remember Rick's pride in his job, something he took very seriously, and his profound sense of loyalty. In a world otherwise tainted with cynicism and bullshit, the memory of his integrity still shines.

For John Day's new civilian career, it doesn't matter to me if he's appointed Pope; it will never wash away his guilt for that rotten pronouncement he gave 10 years ago.

Yours etc,
TYRONE HOPES,

Hook, Hants.

Urban legend

Sir,

Re Eye 1112, p4. Silly Private Eye, always zealously correcting sloppy practice in newspapers while failing to get your own facts right.

The novel in which Douglas Adams tells the "stranger ate my biscuits" story is not Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency (which was in any case published in 1987, not 1988 as you suggest), but So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish (1984). It appears on pp103-107 of the 1985 Pan paperback edition.

Adams was always rather irritated by the suggestion that he'd borrowed the incident from Jeffrey Archer (who apparently used it in A Quiver Full of Arrows in 1982), maintaining that the story had really happened to him in the 1970s... none of which is to say that a similar incident might not have happened to Archer, or to Dawn French, or to the Daily Telegraph reader who sent in the story. The "squirm factor" in this class of urban legend relies on the recognition that the very same thing could have happened to you – so, by the law of averages, there must presumably be times when it does...

Yours urbanely,
PHILIP PURSER-HALLARD,

Via email.

Golze medal

Sir,

I refer to your comments in "The Gong Show" (1109) regarding Mrs Sharon Golze.

One of her roles that you omitted to mention was as a tutor on the diploma in school business management – a course run jointly by NCSL and the University of Lincoln.

As one of the students in her tutor group I can tell you that Mrs Golze is both knowledgeable and highly skilled; demanding yet supportive of her students – in fact an ideal tutor. All of us in her group consider ourselves lucky to have her as a tutor. In my view, she deserves her "gong" for this work alone.

And, for the record, school business managers are NOT "highly-paid" jobs – I know because I have applied for many such positions in the past year. The typical salary range is £20k-£40k per annum – probably a lot less than even the most junior scribbler on a newspaper or periodical receives.

Education is full of unsung heroes and those few who are honoured should be celebrated not have mud thrown at them. Large donors to political funds may get fast tracked through the honours system, but ordinary citizens like Mrs Golze have to undergo the full rigours of verification and confirmation before they receive their award.

Yours faithfully,
JOE SIMMONS,

Tunbridge Wells.

Photo opportunity

Sir,

While captivated by the lust and intrigue that has rocked the English football establishment, I have been frustrated at the lack of newspaper photographs illustrating the principle characters involved. I wonder if your archive contains any images of ageing lotharios with pouting Asian beauties that could satisfy my curiosity of how these exotic affairs might look.

Yours faithfully,
ANDY HOOPER,

London N8.

Anagram

Sir,

Anagram of "Mark Palios" is: "I porks Alam".

ALICK WHITFIELD,

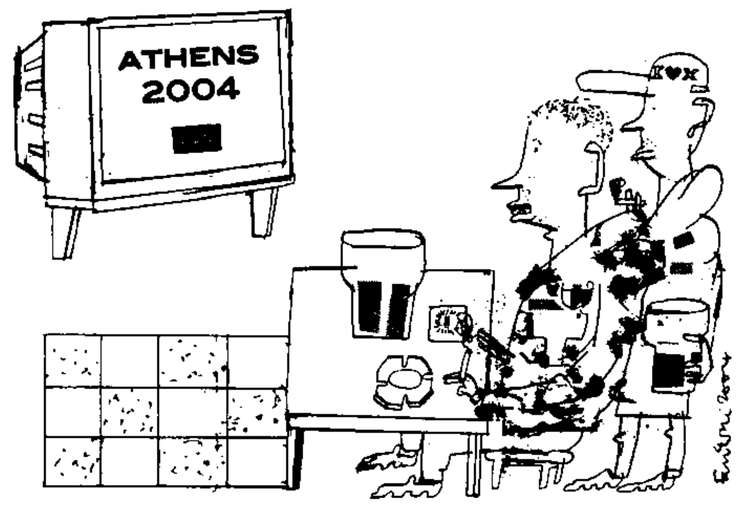
London NW6.

Eriksson stands firm

England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson has launched a strong defence of his position amid allegations of an affair with a Football Association secretary.

BBC website

Scenes You Seldom See



"Who wants to watch Chelsea v Man United when there's two hours of canoe flat water racing followed by the men's 200 metre synchronised weightlifting?"

Charlie's angel

Sir,

I'm not sure that Piloti's arguments against the "Charlie Dimmock" of Ely (Eye 1111) are sustainable. In its naivety, bright coloration and regard of the female form, this figure seems entirely in keeping with medieval church decoration: it is, however, surprisingly popish for an Anglican cathedral.

It would be a shame if after the triple terrors of the Reformation, the Roundheads and the Cambridge Camden Society our gloriously inappropriate and generally awful modern church decorations (eg, wispy etched glass, garish wall paintings and pathetic stained glass) – many erected to celebrate the millennium – are removed. In the future these decorations could provide endless fun and argument in trying to determine the good from the bad, in much the same way as Victorian church "restorations" do now.

Following on from Piloti's idea for a suitable home for Our Lady, may I suggest that all the Georgian putti, nymphs and cherubs which clutter up our churches are sent to the garden centre as well – they would make an attractive addition to any water feature.

Yours,
PAUL HATCHER,

Reading.

Sir,

Can an avowed Irish Catholic endorse Piloti's opinion of Ely Cathedral's restored Lady Chapel, now easily one of Britain's most beautiful buildings, but only because of the wrecking reformers breaking out the stained glass. The huge plain windows now blend down into the cleaned up silvery Caen stone, a near invisible union that bathes the chapel in a brilliant supernatural light that lifts the soul.

Her statue, a heartening turn-around for the reformed church, displays Catholic tradition showing one bare foot – with which to crush the Serpent. She also bears a pleasing resemblance to Nigella Lawson, another cause for celebration I suppose.

PADDY MCGARVEY,

Cambridge.

Latin lovers

Sir,

Re: the window to Rev Blair in St Albion's Parish News, Eye 1111. Surely the text should read "Activavi in bono fide". As all cod Latin scholars know, "Activabit in bono fide" means "He will act in good faith".

To which we say "Fattus chancus".

Keep up the opus bonum.

Yours,
CHARLES G. MOUNT,

Canterbury, Kent.

Beefing about vCJD

Sir,

Muckspreader should take as a compliment his "dead sheep" savaging by the leaders of the BSE/vCJD industry.

As I've pointed out before there never was an epidemic of variant CJD, it was not a "new" disease and there was no causal link between BSE and variant CJD. The failure of the predicted epidemic to appear and the detection of cases of the variant in other countries validate my arguments.

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee has a lot to answer for. Instead of exploring and testing more likely explanations it rushed to the premature judgement that ingestion of abnormal prion was the cause of BSE. Well recognised causes of spongiform encephalopathies, for example, nutritional or neurotoxic, were inadequately investigated and have been frozen out of funds for study. So also have been credible newer hypotheses such as the immunological one propounded by Professor Alan Ebringer. All the funding seems to have been put into prion research to prop up the establishment hypothesis – hardly a surprise given the composition of the committee but poor science.

Epidemics elsewhere – for instance the current spongiform encephalopathy in deer in the USA which cannot have been caused by them eating recycled deer brains – cast doubt on the credibility of recycled cattle brains as the cause of BSE. Yet the establishment persists in clinging to an increasingly threadbare position which unfolding events continue to undermine.

Muckraker does well by the public and farmers by presenting the facts and ignoring the spin.

Yours sincerely,
GEORGE VENTERS,
Consultant in Public Health Medicine.

Sir,

Re: CJD Muckspreading. Those of us who attempt to raise beef cattle have been grappling for 20 years to make sense of scientific pronouncements on this subject and remain little the wiser, no matter how hard we try.

At the time when eating BSE-infected meat was considered quite safe the UK exported most of the senile and decrepit dairy cows to Europe where the Germans, and to a lesser extent the French, happily converted them into sausages and meat pies and patés. Such old animals as harboured BSE prions carried a far higher concentration of them than younger beef cattle that, if infected, were mainly consumed in the UK.

Simple farming folk, like myself, have therefore been led to expect a multitude of vCJD cases in Germany and France, of which, bafflingly, there seems little sign.

Yours (bemusedly),
JOHN FARMER (a beef farmer),
Crawley, W. Sussex.

Pet name

Sir,

Colin Campbell asks how Tony Blair came by the nickname "Miranda" at the Inns of Court. Since a clever chap like Blair must know that Miranda means "one to be admired", clearly he gave himself this name.

Sincerely,
STUART DUNN,
Via email.

The Dubliners

Sir,

May we finally lay to rest the mystery of the men in caps. Fascinating though it is to read such detail in the last three or four Eyes of the activities of the Igoe Gang and the Cairo Gang in the Dublin of 1920 a halt must be called.

The photograph originally published was certainly not of the Cairo Gang but definitely the Igoe firm.

The Cairo Gang were all commissioned officers of the British Army – most with the rank of captain or lieutenant – and I may know little of the sartorial standards that pertained in the 20s but I am absolutely positive that such men would never have been photographed in the caps and mufflers that feature in the photograph that you published. If this seems flimsy evidence I direct the reader to the Kilmainham Jail Historical Museum where the original photograph is still displayed correctly as being of the Igoe Gang.

Humbly yours,
STEVE POUND MP,
Via email.

Lookalike

Mask

Fry

Sir,

I have noticed a surprising similarity between Stephen Fry and the BAFTA Mask. How could this not be noticed?

WILLIAM FIRMINGER,
Howden, Yorkshire.

The Secret Mullah?

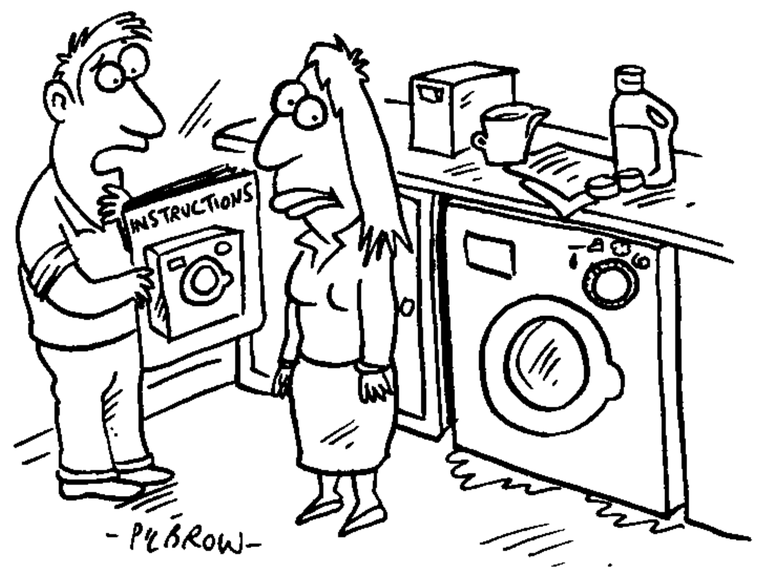
Sir,

Bryn Glover (1112) claims that the BNP's vote would have slumped if the appalling "Secret Agent" programme had been shown before polling day in June.

The fact is that the Thursday after the showing the BNP polled 32 percent in a council election in Leeds – not a million miles from Bradford – beating the combined Tory and Lib-Dem vote.

In the meantime, in the interest of balance, I eagerly await the BBC infiltration of any Muslim extremist group or mosque...

Yours,
ANTHONY DAVID JONES MA,
Ashton u Lyne, Lancs.



"Ah, that symbol means 'flood flat downstairs'"

Friends like these...

Sir,

Paolo Livorati's corrections to the minor errors in Brussels Sprouts, spread more misinformation than the original article. Alleanza Nazionale is not the Italian equivalent of the Conservative Party, no Tory leader (much as I dislike them) has ever done a Fascist salute like Gianfranco Fini. Members of the Tory party do not routinely display photographs of Fascist murderers in their houses. AN is more like an Italian BNP attempting to project a respectable veneer.

If Paolo loves Italy he should vote for the left. I hope he doesn't beat me up and force me to drink castor oil, when I holiday in his lovely country in a few weeks' time.

Vota Rifondazione,
COLIN MACFARLANE,
Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"I hope these young West Indian players do realise the mantle on which they are standing."
VIV RICHARDS, BBC
(Sue Limb)

"He [Graham Thorpe] is a good footballer so he has that instinctive hand-eye coordination."
MICHAEL ATHERTON, Channel 4
(Greg Hawkswell)

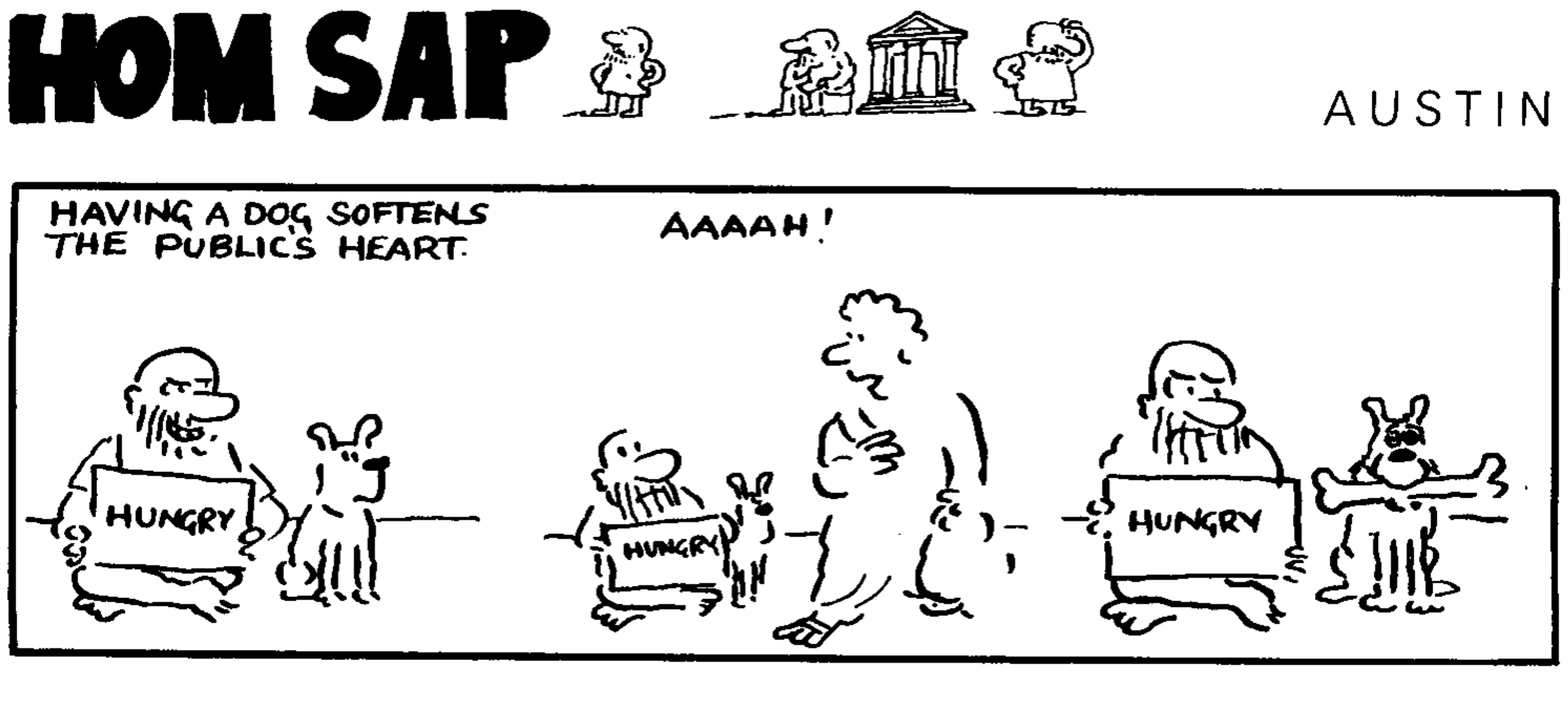
"This would be the cream on the jam for her..."
STUART STOREY, BBC2
(Steve Hill)

"Retiring will put years on his career."
DON HOWE, BBC Sport
(Kieran Hines)

"My advice [to Faria Alam] would be to keep her head down and see how things develop..."
MAX CLIFFORD, Radio 5 Live
(George Saville)

6.15 The Big Interview — Carl Lewis
The nine-time Olympic gold medallist. Times may vary. *219361*

The Guide



Letter from **Windhoek**

from Our Own Correspondent

NAMIBIA is a very dry place. Only the desert thrives. The land is dry, the rivers are dry, even the people are dry. White farmers wizen in the sun. Lizards lick their own eyeballs to make sure they don't crack. Spiders bury themselves in the sand to find some cool. Dogs pant, and pray they don't catch rabies.

Our rabid president, Sam Nujoma, is particularly uncool. He looks like a black Father Christmas and has a slight twinkle in his eye. But do not be deceived: he cannot spot a joke at point blank range and is as stubborn as an ox.

Nujoma is most uncool when you get him on the subject of homosexuals. Like his great friend Robert Mugabe, he thinks homosexuals are worse than pigs and rabid dogs and should be shot, strung up and deported (preferably in that order).

Nujoma lives in some comfort in Windhoek's small but beautiful State House in the city centre. For some reason he's been building another on the hillside just outside the capital. The new state house is not at all beautiful. It's a massive concrete structure which would have fitted in well in communist eastern Europe. So why move? Well, he doesn't much like being asked, but apparently there are not enough parking spaces at the old pile for the limousines of visiting dignitaries.

Nujoma has been president since independence in 1990. He led us to liberation from apartheid South Africa, who took over as colonial power when the Germans were booted out after the First World War. Not that the Germans are forgotten. The streets are clean, the traffic lights work and there is order. Streets still bear German names, Alsatian dogs bark from behind barred gates, the German Lutheran church flourishes and well-tarred roads lead to chocolate box seaside resorts full of Gasthauses run, with military precision, by German-speaking landladies.

Our Herero people also remember the Germans. It is exactly a 100 years since the Kaiser's troops wiped out 65,000 men, women and children — almost the whole tribe — when they objected to their land being handed over to settlers. The German community here is abjectly apologetic. Few expect Berlin, which faces a $4bn claim for compensation over the genocide, to match such generosity of spirit with an equal generosity of wallet.

Land is again the issue. The father of the nation is standing down, with just the one term more than the constitution had originally envisaged under his belt. His designated replacement, Hifikepunye Pahamba, faces elections later this year. But Pahamba is even less charismatic than Nujoma. In order to generate any enthusiasm for his candidacy, he may have to follow in Mugabe's footsteps and play the land card.

There might be plenty of land in Namibia, but just about all of it is in white hands. And for the unions, it is the rallying cry. Black farm workers have fewer rights than the cattle they look after. Quarrel with the boss and you could be thrashed and your family thrown out of house and home without notice.

The union wants the government to force white farmers to give workers job security and land. The white farmers are at long last doing something to improve the workers' lot, but they are reluctant to share their land arguing, conveniently, that division makes for inefficiency. There is an agreed policy of land redistribution on a "willing buyer, willing seller" basis, but progress has been slow and there are suspicions that the only people to have profited so far have been ministers.

The government has promised to protect white farmers (gay or otherwise). But with elections on the horizon, nervous politicians may turn a blind eye to Zimbabwe-style occupations. Already white farms near Windhoek have been raided and sabotaged. And their colleagues upcountry can be a hundred miles from the nearest police station. They may be advised to cock their guns and sharpen their dogs' teeth.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

O "The man introduced himself as an inspector from the local authority," Olof Carlsson told reporters in his restaurant in Soderhamn, "and said he'd come to test our food and drink. He showed me his official card, then said that he needed to check that there was the correct amount of alcohol in each of the drinks we serve. He took some scientific equipment out of his bag, and asked us to prepare all of our various drinks, and line them up for him on the bar. Then we carried on laying the tables, and left him to perform his tests.

"About half an hour later, I went back into the bar area, and began to suspect that all was not as it seemed. Most of the glasses were empty, and the inspector was staggering around the room, clearly very drunk indeed. When I asked him what he was doing, he began shouting at me in very slurred speech, and calling me a mongol, which I found very insulting. He then knocked most of the glasses off the bar, and was obviously starting to lose muscle control because he started to wet himself. At that point I looked again at his official card, and realised it was actually a 1968 Soderhamn public library card, and that his scientific equipment was really just a bicycle repair kit. After consulting with my staff, we decided that something was not quite right and called the police, but by the time they'd got here, the man had staggered out of the door and disappeared. It was an odd crime, because he didn't have time to enjoy his drinks, he just gulped them down. But alcohol is very expensive in Sweden, so perhaps he thinks it was worth it." *(Halsinge-Kuriren, 7/7/04. Spotter: Peter Owen)*

– O –

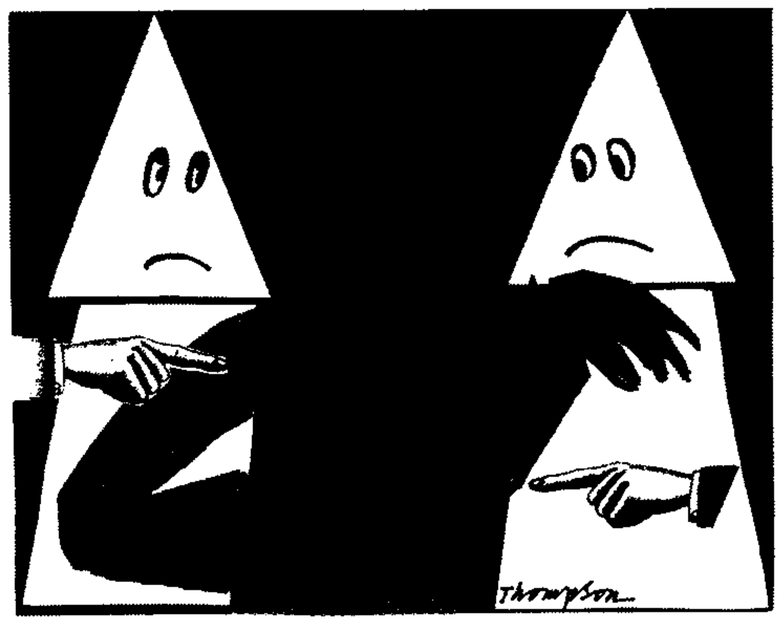
O *"It's simply another form of outsourcing, like a telephone call centre, only more spiritual," Rector James Narithookil of Dharmaram College told reporters in Bangalore. "Roman Catholic priests are in very short supply in the United States and Europe, and there just aren't enough of them to meet all the requests for a Mass for special intentions, even though the relatives of the sick or the deceased are willing to pay. But here in India, there are thousands of Catholic priests who can hold special services, and even requiems, for as little as $10. So the requests are passed onto us by e-mail, we fulfil them, and everybody is happy."*

The Rector was speaking in response to complaints from Western Catholics, shocked that their paid requests for services and Mass intentions are being fulfilled not by their local churches, but in India. "The requests are mostly routed to Indian churches through the Vatican," explained Bishop Sebastian Adayanthrath in Kerala, "and are passed onto needy priests, who say the Masses in the local language, which here is Malayalam. We get an average of about 350 Mass intentions a month, and the extra money is a welcome supplement for the clergy. The prayer is just as heartfelt as it would be if it was said in America or Europe, it's just in a different language, that's all. And every prayer is treated just the same, whether it is paid for in dollars, euros, or rupees." (The New York Times, 13/6/04. Spotter: Anya Schiffrin)

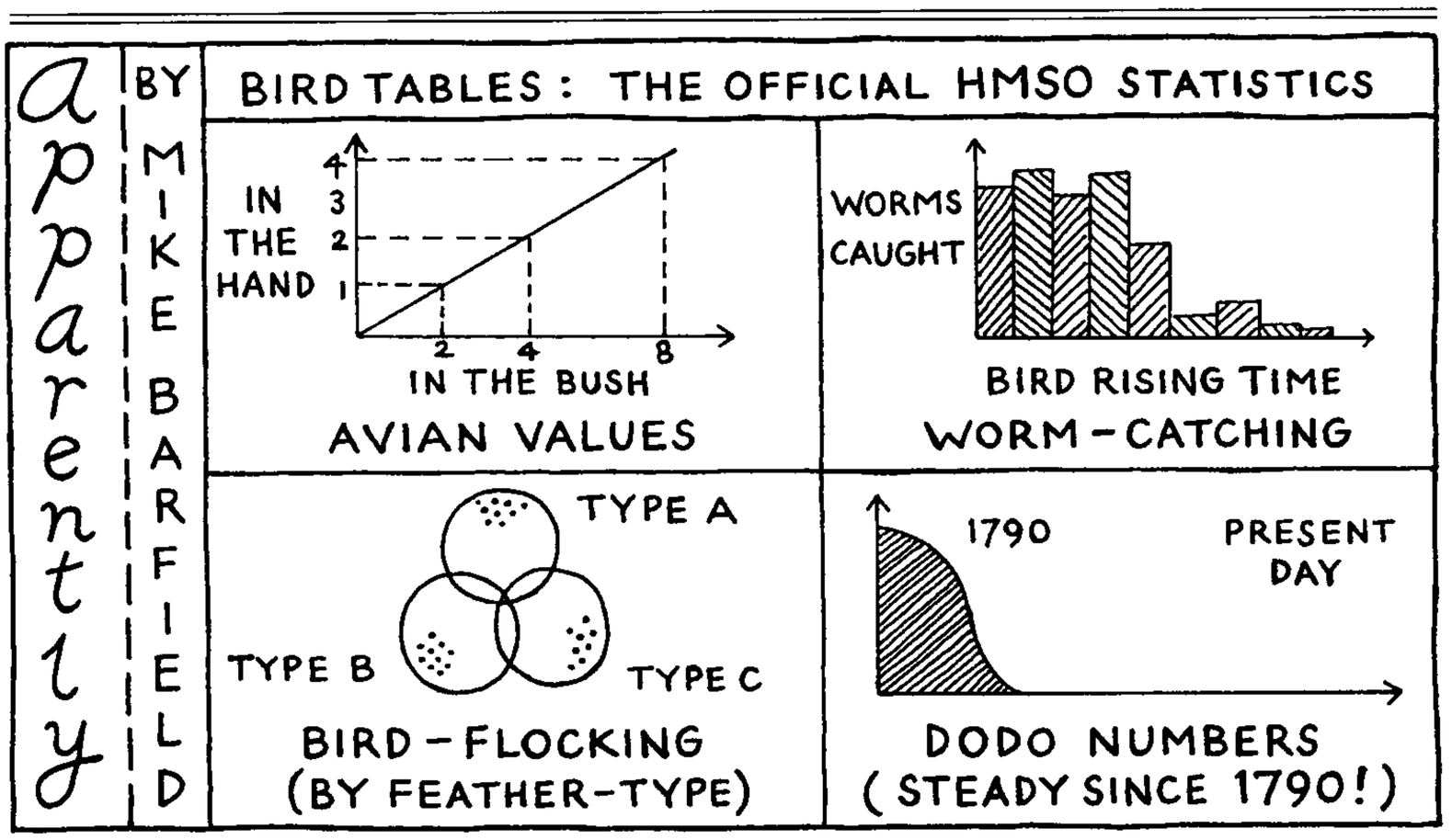
– O –

O "The little missus was away at a Tupperware convention, so I had to do my own laundry," Klansman Arnie Stevens told reporters outside his house in Pigeon Hole, Oklahoma. "But I'm not used to washing clothes, and they say this has happened because I didn't separate my whites from my coloureds. A Cincinnati Reds tee-shirt must have gotten into the wash, that's why my robe turned pink. This just goes to show that segregation is the way of the Lord. In laundry and also in life."

Stevens was speaking after trying to attend a Ku Klux Klan rally, dressed in a pink hood and



pink robe, and being ordered to leave. "I only have one robe and hood, so I had to wear them. But the others told me to go home immediately, because they said pink made me look like a faggot. Unfortunately, my fellow Klansmen judged me solely on the colour of my robe. But I can't help what colour my robe is, can I? It's what's inside that counts." *(Maryland Live Journal, 27/5/04. Spotter: David Harvey)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Calamari! (Which is the word for 'hullo' here in Greece, where Cherie and I are privileged to be attending the opening of the Olympic Games!)

And how appropriate that the Games should have come back to where they began, in the wonderful old city of Athens, birthplace of democracy!

And aren't the Games great? You know, there are some people back home who disapprove of competitive games!

You know the type I mean. They don't like School Sports Days. They want to ban the egg-and-spoon race at the village fete.

They can't bear anything that shows the person as better than another at anything.

But, hey, isn't that what life's all about?

Aren't we all engaged in a race of some kind with those around us?

If there's only one seat left on the bus, don't we all rush to get it first?

What's it the Good Book says? "The first shall be first and the last shall be last" *(Guinness Book of Records, 4.17).*

We all know people who are losers in this life – and what a bitter, twisted lot they are!

I'm sure you can all think of examples, even in our own parish! People who dropped out of the race when they saw that they weren't getting anywhere – and now stand on the sidelines, jeering, as they watch the winner proudly breasting the tape!

But then there might be another competitor who tries very hard – does all the training, works away round the clock, but just doesn't quite have that extra something special that separates the gold medallist from the Scottish bloke who is doomed always to come second!

No – give me a winner any day! And best of all, the guy who can win gold, and then come back four years later to win another, and who knows, even a third in a row!

That would be something truly Olympian, wouldn't it?

There's something for you all to ponder on in the coming days, as you sit at home watching the drama of the Athens Olympics unfolding on your television screens, while I am lucky enough to be seeing it live with the Chief Archimandrite and my other oecumenical brethren!

Taramasalata! (as they say here instead of 'goodbye'!)

Tony

Congratulations!

The vicar would like to offer his blessing to Mr.Blunkett and his new lady companion.

Although the lady appears to be married, they are both adults and what they do in the privacy of their own home office is up to them.

It's their own affair!

Those members of the congregation who have been quoting back at me my sermon about "the decadent morality of the nineteen sixties" have totally misunderstood the point I was trying to make and they should be ashamed of themselves – *T.B.*

TEXT FOR THE DAY

"It is more blessed to receive than to give".

(Phreebees, 7,3)

Perhaps some of the more envious members of the parish could think about this one over the holiday period! T.B

Attention All Mums And Dads!!!

An Urgent Message From Mrs Hodge, Our Parish Child Protection Coordinator

All parents are invited to the compulsory summer school in Parenting Skills, where experts on childcare, led by myself, will give instruction to all of you on where you are going wrong in bringing up your kids.

Subjects will include:

1. Am I middle-class, and what can I do about it?
2. Dads – get off your mobile, give up your job and spend some quality home with the kids!
3. Mums – stop hanging around at home and get out to work! (This course has been temporarily dropped from the curriculum.)
4. Kids – know your rights! Are your parents telling you what to do? If so, you could be entitled to compensation! Ring in confidence Childcash, Matrix Chambers, C/o Ms Booth QC, the vicarage and you could win a huge cash pay-out and/or see your parents in gaol!

- *Remember – attendence at these courses is mandatory for all adults, regardless of gender, sexual orientation or ethnic affiliation.*
- *Excuses from parents such as "lack of childcare" will <u>not</u> be accepted. Dump the kids with someone and turn up!*

Mrs Jowell is looking for volunteers to help with the refreshments.

Sorry, but once again we must remind you that home-made cakes or sandwiches are no longer permissible under health and safety rules; but any contributions bought direct from our friend Mr Sainsbury's shop in the High Street have been "vetted" as entirely acceptable.

Particularly recommended are his new GM salmon-flavoured scones!

VICAR LUDORUM!

Local artist Mr De La Nougerede captures all the excitement of the vicar's trip to Athens!

Love Is Blind

by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, best-selling author of
Heir of Sorrows, and La Dame Aux Camillas

THE STORY SO FAR: It is the night of the Spectator *party – London's most glittering social event where the cream of the capital's political and literary lions mingle with the world's most beautiful women.*

Now read on...

THE ATMOSPHERE was filled with gaiety and laughter; champagne corks popped and snatches of brilliant conversation wafted on the breeze through the gardens of Doughty Street... "Michael Gove is the one to watch" ... "I think UKIP are the real threat"... "They only pay £100 for a column. Worse than the *Oldie*..."

And there on the edge of the throng was the beautiful American heiress Tiffany Cartier, whose father owned most of New Dworkin and ran DworkMart, the rubber-tyre-to-breakfast-cereal conglomerate. Nervously she sipped her glass of Francis Pym's No. 1 Cup, trying to find a friendly face in the crowd who she could approach with confidence.

They were all so sparkling and brilliant. There was Boris Johnson, the dashing young editor, in his bicycle clips, fresh from the House of Commons, who many tipped to be the new leader of the Conservative Party. And at his side the devastatingly attractive columnist Petronella Wyfront, giggling at Boris's every *bon mot.* And there in the corner, under the table – wasn't that the glamorous tousle-haired controversial writer Rod Liddle, surrounded by a bevy of gorgeous young girls from the magazine's sub-editing department?

Standing there in the blossom-scented courtyard, it was clear to Tiffany that romance was everywhere.

But sadly not for her. All her diamonds and jewels, her Puccini handbag and her little black cocktail dress from Schumacher's could not conceal her feelings of loneliness here in London, thousands of miles from home.

SUDDENLY something cold and wet touched her beautiful perfectly-formed thigh. She looked down to see a black labrador. And behind the dog was the most attractive man she had ever come across. And she had seen many at her father's celebrated New Dworkin soirées – Jeb Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, and even Henry Kissinger.

But this man was different. Bearded, tall and distinguished, he had the enigmatic smile of a man who could always make a woman feel wanted.

"What ho, Home Secretary! Jolly decent of you to come to our bash!" boomed Boris, rushing forward with hand outstretched to greet the mysterious stranger. "Let me introduce you to our publisher, the gorgeous Tiffany Cartier. Tiffany – this is The Right Honourable David Blunkett."

The timid American millionairess could scarcely contain her excitement. She gulped. Not *the* David Blunkett? The David Blunkett behind the crackdown on asylum seekers?

"I'm an alien," she said wittily. "I hope you're not going to send *me* home!"

He chuckled. "You have a beautiful voice," he said. "And I expect you are a very beautiful woman."

The floppy-haired editor of the *Spectator* realised that he was in the presence of a chemistry that was growing more powerful with every second.

"Ooh-er! I'd better make myself scarce," said Boris with the subtlety that was his hallmark. "Oh look – there's Oliver Letwin. I must go and commission an amusing Diary from him..."

SUDDENLY they were alone. Tiffany and David. Together. With only Sophie the faithful guidedog as chaperone.

"I think she likes you," said the hirsute Home Secretary. "These dogs guide you down the safest path, but something tells me that the path we're going down together is anything but safe..."

There was a scream of delighted laughter as the dashing figure of Rod Liddle fell out of a window into the goldfish pond.

This was going to be a night to remember...

(To be continued)

© *Sylvie Krin 2004.*

BLUNKETT NEW CRACKDOWN

by Our Home Affairs Staff **Taki Stuff**

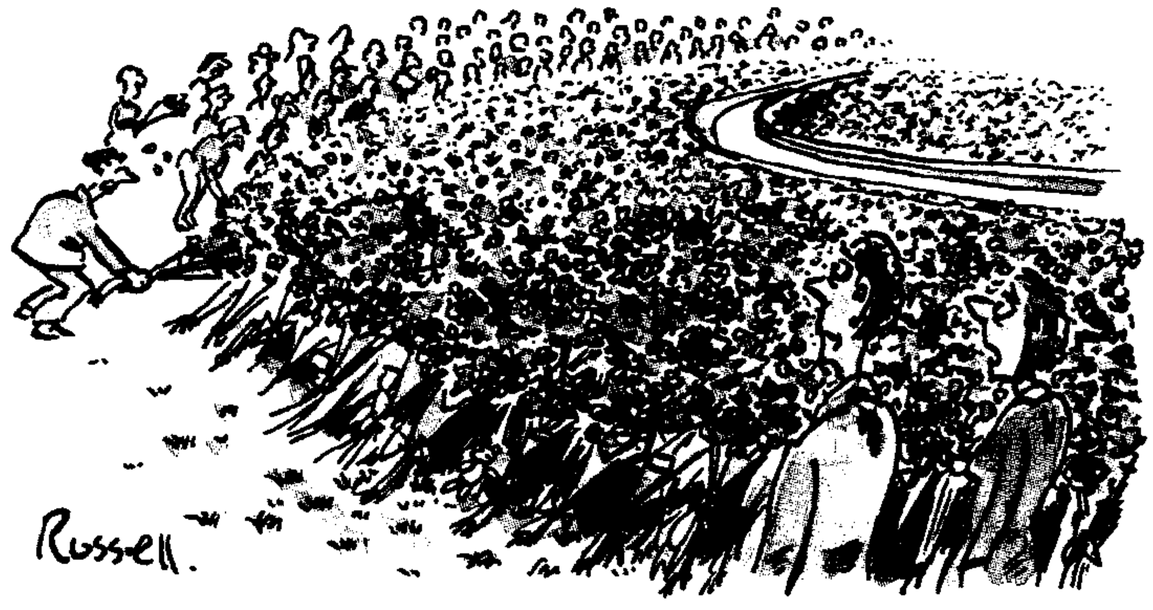
THE HOME Secretary has announced a new crackdown on media intrusion into politicians' private lives as "an important part of the war against terror".

Police will be given new powers to arrest on sight any journalists lurking outside senior politicians' love-nests on the grounds that this breaches the vital security of the government.

Reporters who write about politicians' affairs will be subject to on-the-spot fines or even imprisonment "for aiding and abetting terrorists".

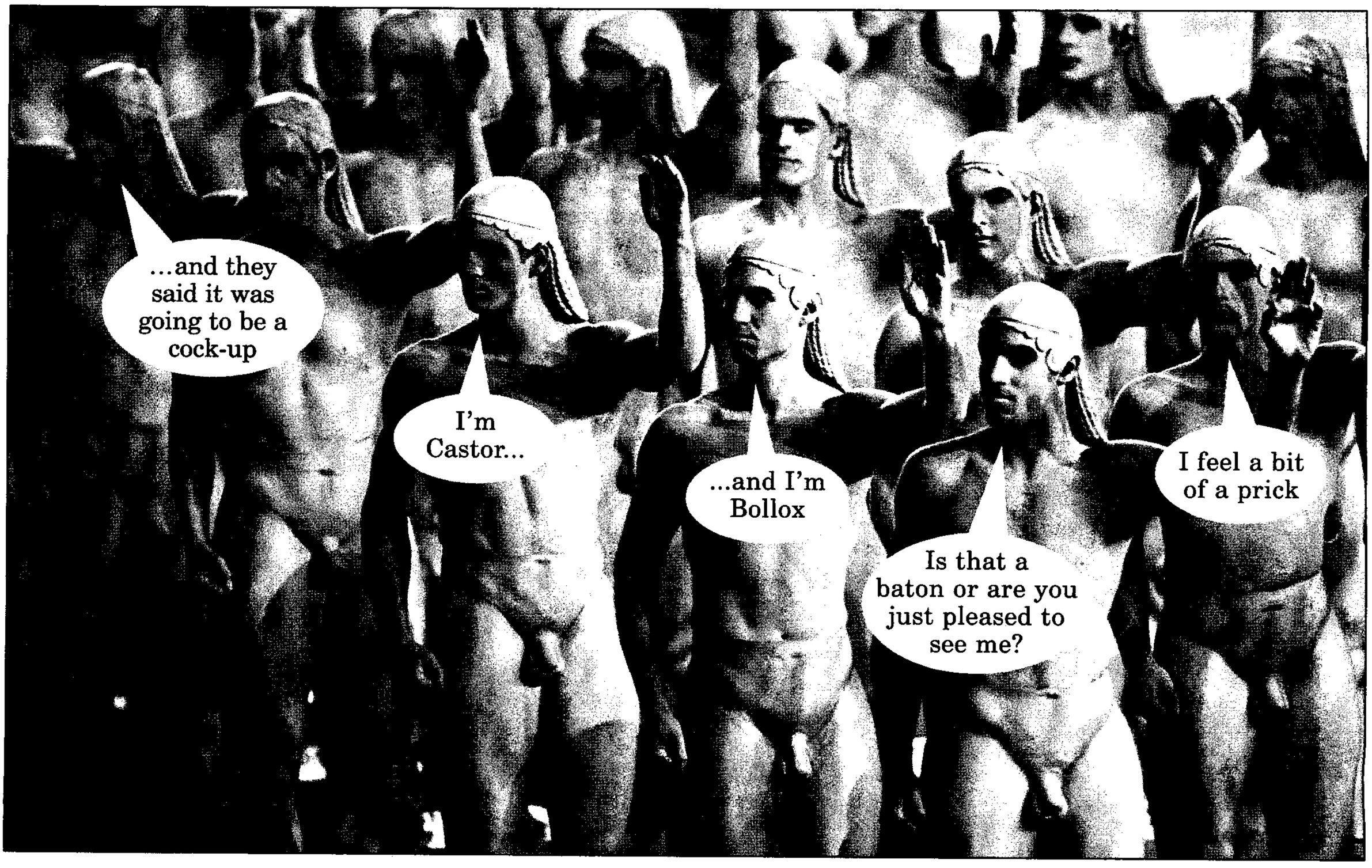
"You have until the end of today to leave London," he told reporters "or you will be shot on sight."

Diana Memorial Latest



"The pump died"

GREEK OLYMPIC TRIUMPH


...and they said it was going to be a cock-up
I'm Castor...
...and I'm Bollox
Is that a baton or are you just pleased to see me?
I feel a bit of a prick

THE Sun SAYS

LOTTERY LUNACY

ALL DECENT-MINDED Britons will be shocked by the news that a notorious sex-fiend has been allowed to win a £800 million jackpot in the great Media Lottery.

Rupert Murdoch, nicknamed the 'Dirty Digger', has for years been known as a serial smut peddler. But now he is laughing all the way to the bank, as he pockets his ill-gotten gains.

The Sun Says, "Oi, you, scumbag, give it all back." *(You're fired. Ed.)*

JANE MOORE IS AWAY

having her hand removed from her face

BUSH DEFENDS 'TERROR WARNINGS'

PRESIDENT BUSH has shrugged off criticism that the recent Al Qaeda terror warnings issued by his administration were based on out-of-date intelligence.

"No one who has seen these Al Qaeda documents and read their plans to assassinate Abraham Lincoln and bomb Pearl Harbor would ever say that," said George *(cont. p. 94)*

"And as the heroic athletes raced back to provide urine samples, they lost control of the motorcycle"

World of Soccer

NEASDEN'S NEW MENU – COURTESY OF DELIA!

by **E.I. Adidas,** Our Man On The Terraces With The Copy Of *Nuts* Magazine

THE WORLD of soccer was rocked to its foundations yesterday by the news that Neasden FC are to be eating a whole new diet this season in an attempt to bring cup glory to the Squirrels.

FAT LOT OF GOOD

The brain behind the experiment is world famous cookery writer, Delia Cohen, the author of best-selling book *Food For Everybody* (Cohen Books, Cohen Press £11.99).

Says Delia, "The Neasden squad have not paid sufficient attention to their diet which has led to goal famine at the Bridge. Now with my new match-day diet, the lads in yellow will run onto the park ready to give it 150%."

That Delia Diet in Full

Sausage
Chips
Egg
Crisps
Curry
Lager

LATE SCORE

AFC Neasden 0
Dollis Hill 0

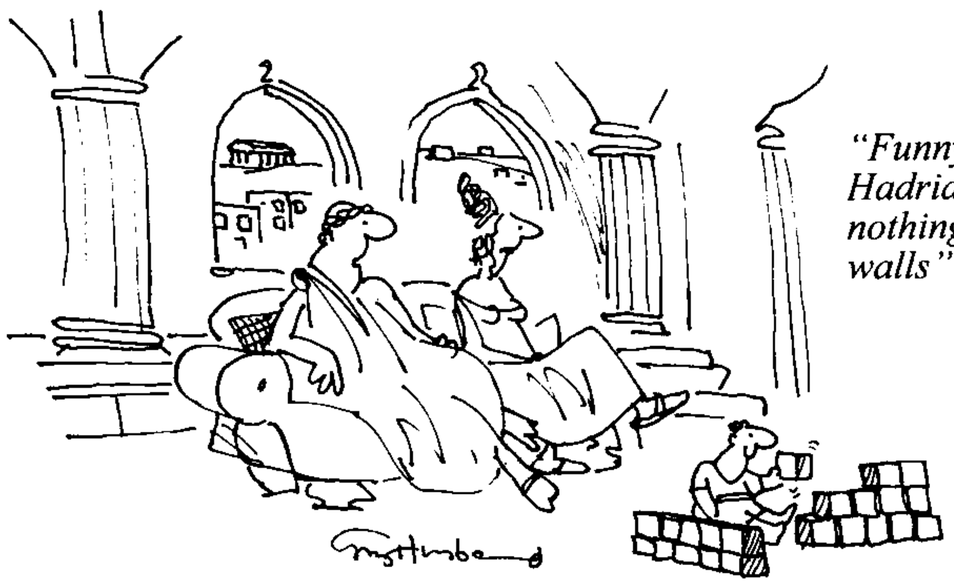
(Match abandoned due to food poisoning)

The Official Report into the Leaking of the Hutton Inquiry Report to The Sun

by Lord Hutton

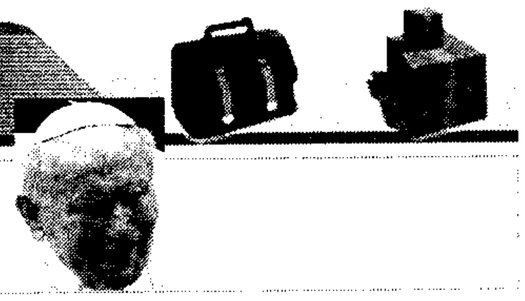
WHILE it may be true that when reading his advance copy of my report Alastair Campbell may subconsciously have given the impression to everyone working in Number 10 that it would be in the Government's interest to leak my report to the *Sun* by jumping up and down and screaming "The stupid bastard's only gone and cleared us!", "We've got Gilligan and Dyke by the balls!", "Those BBC bastards are going to pay now!", and "Trevor Kavanagh has to see this now – not in 45 minutes' fucking time!"... I found no evidence whatsoever that anyone in Government was responsible for leaking my report.

Therefore I conclude that it must have been done by Andrew Gilligan... or Greg Dyke... or one of those other evil BBC people.



"Funny how Hadrian builds nothing but walls"

My eBay



j-p2 (665)

Items I'm Bidding On (1-4 of 4 items)

		Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐	***AUTHENTIC*8x10 signed photo Sir Cliff Richard**	EUR 35.00	EUR 3.00	2
☐	**'Pep Up Your Public Speaking' book – quips, anecdotes, jokes, any occasion**	EUR 14.99	EUR 3.50	1
☐	**"My Other Car's A Ferrari" hilarious bumper sticker!**	EUR 2.00	EUR 1.50	2
☐	**Barbecue Charcoal – guaranteed Smoke-Free – 10 kg bag**	EUR 24.99	Buyer to collect	1

Items I'm Selling (1-3 of 3 items)

		Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐	**'The Da Vinci Code' – 1st edn – new – unwanted gift**	EUR 0.99	free	0
☐	**Men's rollerblades, size 43 (9), used, good cond. – plus customised helmet, XXL**	EUR 50.00	EUR 15.00	1
☐	**'Will and Grace' DVD (R2) – watched once (bought in error)**	EUR 14.99	EUR 2.00	1

Prom Highlights

Opera

Stunning new production of Berlusconi's *Il Freebi in Sardinia*, performed by the European Union Orchestra, conducted by Felix Mandelson.

Act One

The young Englishman Antonio, accompanied by his lovely wife Cheriebina, arrives in Italy, looking for somewhere to stay the night. The couple sing the duet *'Nissan Dorma'* (*'We don't want to sleep in the car'*).

Act Two

The villainous Count Silvio appears, disguised as a humble prime minister, and invites the couple to stay with him in his luxurious castle, the Palazzo Cosa Nostra.

The couple are serenaded by the Count's servants, in the famous *Mafiosi Chorus*.

Act Three

Enchanted by the Count's generous hospitality, Antonio sings of his love for getting something for nothing, in the aria *'Dolce fa niente'* (*'It is sweet not to have to pay'*).

But his happiness is short-lived when the local carabinieri arrive at the castle to arrest his host for not paying his taxes. They sing *'Your bank account is frozen'*.

Antonio and Cheriebina return sadly to Barbados, to stay with their wise old friend Sir Clifford de Riches, who welcomes them with the show-stopping aria *'I am paying for your summer holiday, no more spending for a a week or two'*.

SUDAN CRISIS LATEST

by **No-Lunchtime No-Booze**

THE CRISIS in the Sudan is growing worse with every passing day, as hundreds of thousands of British journalists hungry for a story flood into the region.

"We believe this sudden influx has been caused by the onset of summer in Britain, the fact Westminster is in recess and *Big Brother* has ended. Editors are so starved of news for their front pages," said one aid worker stunned by the sheer volume of journalists on the ground, "that they will even run a serious story like this."

The aid agencies are warning that this unprecedented influx of journalists means *(cont. p. 94)*

"HMM THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THE WAY YOUR CITY HAS PRESENTED OUR LOGO THAT'S NOT QUITE RIGHT...
OLYMPIC COMMITTEE
NOW THAT'S MORE LIKE IT!
CRUISE KEYS
€1000

That All-Purpose Slapper Interview In Full

As seen on ITV and all channels

Interviewer: This must be very difficult for you?

Slapper: I'm still in shock really.

Interviewer: What are your feelings now about *(Here the interviewer may insert the name Sven, Becks, Chazza, Wayne, President Clintstone or whichsoever other celebrity love-rat may be appropriate)*?

Slapper: I always thought we had something really special together. *(Long pause)* I guess I was in love with him.

Interviewer: *(putting on concerned face)*: And are you still?

Slapper *(tears welling up)*: This is very hard for me. I always thought it would last. So yes. *(Camera zooms in for close-up of tears on perfectly made-up face)* The answer is yes.

Interviewer: Join us after the break, when I'll be asking questions about oral sex.

Slapper: Can I have the money now?

(Fade. Commercials for cars, beer, crisps etc. Collage of photos of slapper not wearing many clothes, with caption 'The Slapper Interview – Part Two')

Interviewer: Was he a good lover?

Slapper: Well, I don't like to talk about these things. They're very personal and painful.

Interviewer: Would this perhaps help?

(Assistant producer enters with huge wheelbarrow piled with money)

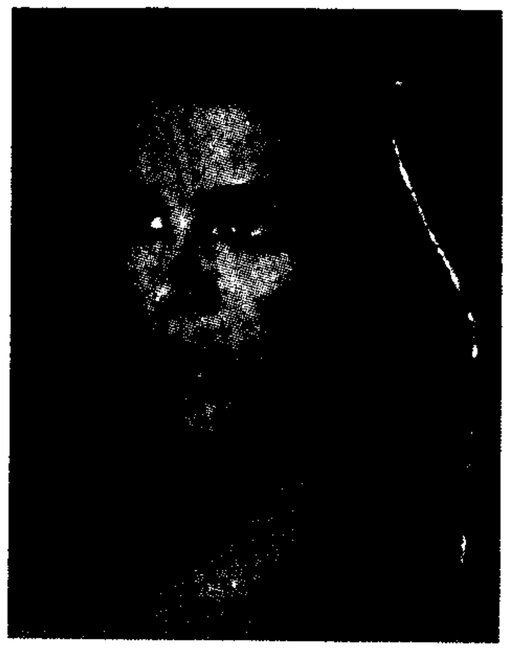
Slapper: He was an animal in bed. But also very gentle and considerate.

Interviewer: This is more like it! Can you give us a bit more detail?

(WARNING: The following answer may not be considered suitable for family viewing)

Slapper: He ripped off my silk underwear... manhood... pleasure... oral sex... at it all night... best sex ever... always put trousers in trouser press before we satisfied our animal urges... a perfect gentleman...

(Slapper continues in similar



vein until the TV company runs out of money)

Interviewer: Now it's all over, do you feel – how can I put this? – used?

Slapper: No, we were both adults. I went into it with my eyes open. And, frankly, what went on between us is nobody's business except ours.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for talking to us. We'll be sending the rest of the money to Mr Clifford.

(Final collage of Slapper wearing even fewer clothes, counting pile of banknotes)

Continuity: After that historic and extraordinary interview, join us again after the break for the News.

(More commercials for crisps, beers and cars. Followed by News logo)

BONG! *(Or it may be BONK!)*

Newsreader: In an historic and extraordinary interview on this channel, a slapper has given details for the first time or her intimate relationship with a celebrity love-rat.

(Picture of Slapper wearing carefully chosen full-length outfit, possibly white, to suggest to viewers that she is not a slapper, but a put-upon victim of shameless male exploitation. Cut to scene from interview)

Slapper: I went into it with my legs open. Oh no, I've got that wrong, haven't I?

Producer: Can we do that bit again?

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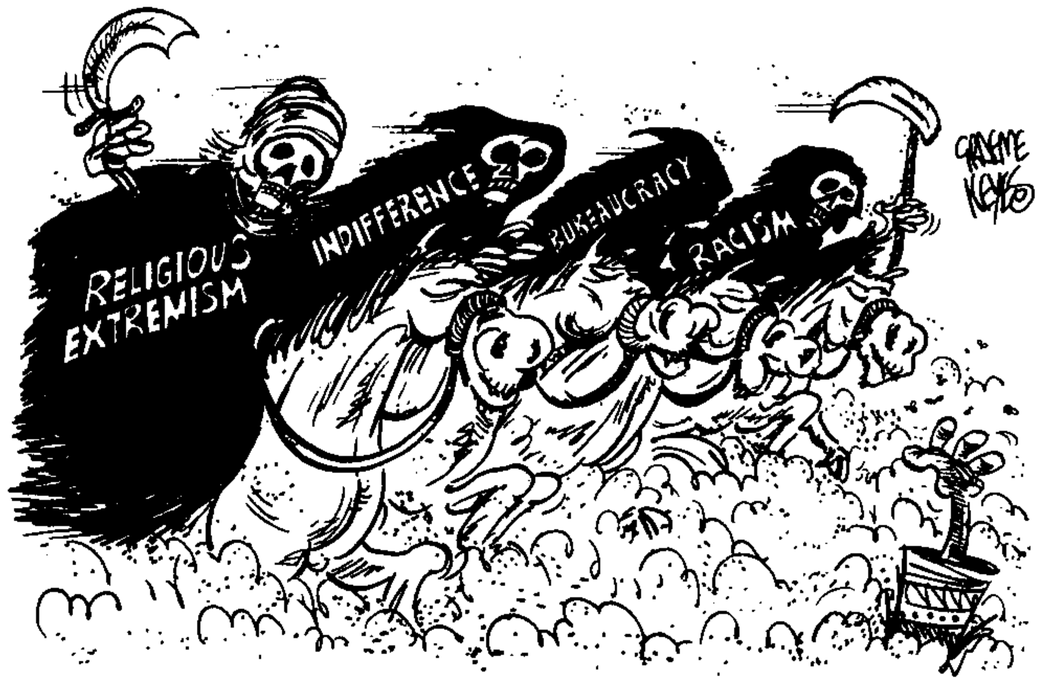

Darfor Horsemen of the Apocalypse

PRISON DOESN'T WORK – AT LAST THE PROOF

by Our Prison Staff **Phil Cells**

A SHOCK report by the influential Michael Howard League For Penal Reform dismisses the widely accepted idea that it is possible to reform hardened criminals.

The report cites as an example the tragic case of 'Mr H', a long-term offender, who recently made headlines by announcing that he was "going straight" and that he had learned his lesson.

Horror Tory

"My long years of bitter experience have taught me," he recently announced, "that I have to change my ways and be more caring, compassionate and open to modern ideas.

"Only that way," said Mr H, "can I be accepted back into the community as a reformed character and win the next election."

Back To Smith Square One

But only a few weeks later Mr H was caught slipping back into his old ways.

He was filmed in Middlesbrough on CCTV, shouting "Build more prisons. String 'em up. It's the only language they understand."

A Prison Psychiatrist writes: *It is notoriously difficult for men such as these to change the habits of a lifetime. Mr H's case is sadly typical of* (cont. p. 94)

NEW TERROR
Vampire Strikes In Broad Daylight

'IRAQI POLITICIAN NOT CROOK' SHOCK

From Our Man In Baghdad **Rageh Omaar Simpson**

THE WORLD of Iraqi politics was rocked to its foundations yesterday when another car bomb blew up. But there was another story which has left observers shocked and stunned with disbelief.

It has been revealed that a member of the new Iraqi Ruling Council, Mr Ahmed Wannabi, had committed no crimes of any kind, and appeared to be entirely innocent.

Even the most hardened Iraqi analysts were disbelieving that such a thing could have happened.

Said one of them, "We have crawled over his record with a toothcomb, and we cannot find a single case of fraud or even murder".

Mr Wannabi is now being widely tipped to be the next person to be assassinated by one of his colleagues.

On Other Pages

Footballer not jailed **3**
Tories display unity **4**
Bishop praises popular hymn **5**
Diana fountain working perfectly **94**

"I'm not laughing, I was just expecting something a bit more hi-tech"

Bernard Levin Pays Tribute To The Late Himself

"Where are the songs of yesteryear?
Aye, where are they now?"

I CAN only have one subject for my column this week, and that is the departure from this vale of tears – and if you have them, prepare to shed them now – of a man who was most celebrated, as many would argue, and who am I to contradict them, as my Bessarabian grandmother used to say, for his unrivalled mastery of, or some might suggest weakness for, embarking on sentences of such extravagant, nay excessive length, laced, it must be said, with dependent clauses and sub-clauses of such prolixity that they irresistibly brought to mind the operatic works of that unparalleled master, the great, nay immortal Wagner, or, to choose another analogy, the interleaved layers of nectarine and millefeuille served by Monsieur Pierre Grossetruffe in one of those exquisite puddings for which his delightful restaurant Les Trois Pigeons Droles is rightly acclaimed across the known world (and while on the subject, I can scarce forbear also to mention his legendary Bananes de Robespierre) or, to select yet another linguistic trope *(That's enough Levin. God.)*

Daily Mail

What's So Wrong With Wasps?

Asks The World's Worst Columnist Max Hastings

ON ALL sides these days I hear people complaining of a plague of wasps.

Picnics are spoiled. Barbecues are ruined. One cannot even sit out in the garden, reading a copy of the *Daily Mail*, they say, without being pestered by one of the little black and yellow brigade. *(Keep going. P.D)*

But I ask this. What's all the fuss about?

Are we such a namby-pamby nation of wasp-fearing wimps that we can't cope with a few harmless stings?

I say it's time someone stood up for the Great British Wasp.

What, I wonder, would Winston Churchill have *(cont'd. p. 94)*

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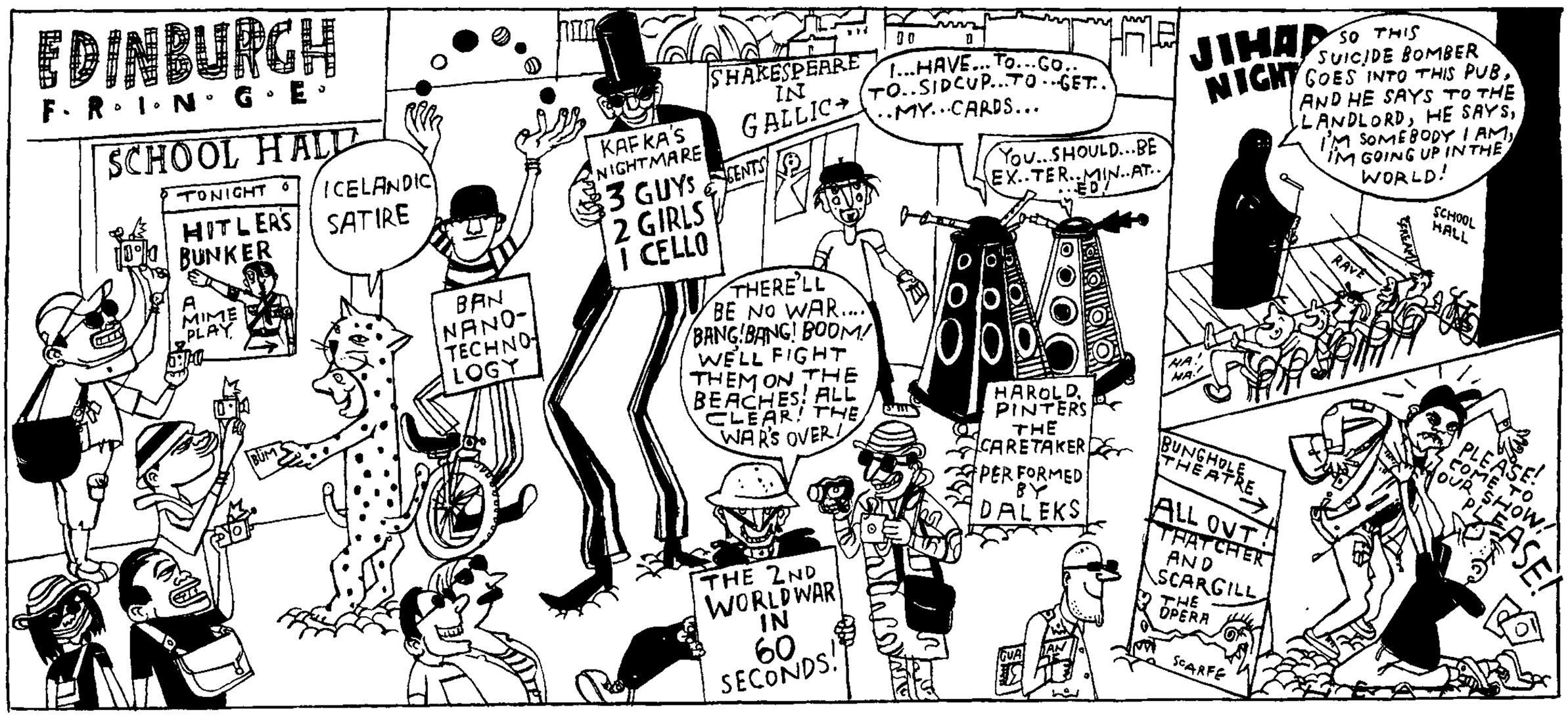

EDINBURGH
F·R·I·N·G·E·
SCHOOL HALL
TONIGHT
HITLER'S BUNKER
A MIME PLAY
ICELANDIC SATIRE
BAN NANO-TECHNO-LOGY
KAFKA'S NIGHTMARE
3 GUYS 2 GIRLS 1 CELLO
SHAKESPEARE IN GALLIC→
I...HAVE...TO...GO.. TO..SIDCUP...TO...GET.. ..MY...CARDS...
YOU...SHOULD...BE EX..TER..MIN..AT.. ..ED!
THERE'LL BE NO WAR.... BANG! BANG! BOOM! WE'LL FIGHT THEM ON THE BEACHES! ALL CLEAR! THE WAR'S OVER!
THE 2ND WORLDWAR IN 60 SECONDS!
HAROLD PINTERS THE CARETAKER PERFORMED BY DALEKS
JIHAD NIGHT
SO THIS SUICIDE BOMBER GOES INTO THIS PUB, AND HE SAYS TO THE LANDLORD, HE SAYS, I'M SOMEBODY I AM, I'M GOING UP IN THE WORLD!
SCHOOL HALL
RAVE
HA! HA!
BUNGHOLE THEATRE →
ALL OUT! THATCHER AND SCARGILL THE OPERA
SCARFC
PLEASE! COME TO OUR SHOW! PLEASE!

POETRY CORNER

In memoriam Red Adair – firefighter extraordinaire

So. Farewell
Then Red
Adair.

You were famous for
Putting out
Fires.

Let us hope
You do not go
To the
Other Place.

Because even you
Would find it difficult
To put out
That fire.

E.J. Thribb

PS. Red Adair. It is a
Strange name.

Let us hope
Readers do
Not
Confuse
You with
Fred Astaire
About whom I wrote
Some years
Ago.

E.J. Thribb

In memoriam Fay Wray, star of *King Kong*

So. Farewell
Then Fay
Wray,
Star of the silent
Screen.

You were
Most famous for
Being waved about
At the top of
The Empire State
Building
By a giant
Ape.

Sadly, you did
Not have
A catchphrase
Because you were a star
Of the
Silent screen.

E.J. Thribb (17½ storeys)

"Stroppy cow. Just because we pronounce her name wrong"

That Honorary Degree Citation In Full

SALUTAMUS J.K. ROWLINGA, CREATRIX IMMORTALIS HARIUS POTTERI, FAMOSISSIMUS PUPILLUS HOGWARTENSIS ACADEMIA WIZARDIUM ET ARTIBUS MAGICIS, ET AMICUS RONALDUS WEASELLII ET HERMIONIA GRANGERIUM, QUI APPARUNT IN NUMEROS LIBROS LUCRATIVISSIMOS BESTSELLERENSISQUE, PER EXEMPLO HARIUS POTTERI ET LAPIDUS PHILOSOPHI, HARIUS POTTERI ET CAMERA SECRETORUM ET HARIUS POTTERI ET CAPTIVUS AZKABANENSIS ET (SATIS LIBRORUM. ED.) SED ATQUE ADAPTATUS CINEMATOGRAPHICA CUM SEQUENTIA INGENIO UTILATI EFFECTOS SPECIALIS COMPUTERENSIS IN PARTICULARUM LUDUS QUIDDITCHUS UBI HARIUS VOLAT IN CAELO IN QUESTO FAMOSI SNITCHEM AUREUM ET GRIFFINDORII VINCIT SLYTHERINOS. HOORAH, HOORAH, HOORAM!!! PER EXEMPLO HARIUS POTTERI ET LAPIDUS PHILOSOPHI ET HARIUS POTTERI ET CAMERA SECRETORUM ET (SATIS FILMORUM. ED.) NUNC ROWLINGA EST DIVISISSIMA FEMINA IN MUNDO, SUPRA REGINAM BRITTANICAE ET MADONNA GAUDEAMUS!

© University of Edinburgh (formerly the Musselburgh Technical Institute)

Soap Shock

THAT STOLEN EASTENDERS SCRIPT IN FULL

Man: Shut it, you slag.

Woman: Leave it aht.

Another Man: Oi, don't even think abaht it.

Another Woman: We've gotta talk.

First Man: I don't believe I'm hearing this.

Second Woman: You make me sick, do you know that?

Another Man: Shut it, you slag.

First Woman: Leave it aht.

Scriptwriter: I don't believe I'm writing this.

Viewer: Leave it off.

(Continued Episode 94)

Late News

POLICE investigating the theft of six months' worth of *EastEnders* scripts say their greatest fear is that they could fall into the wrong hands.

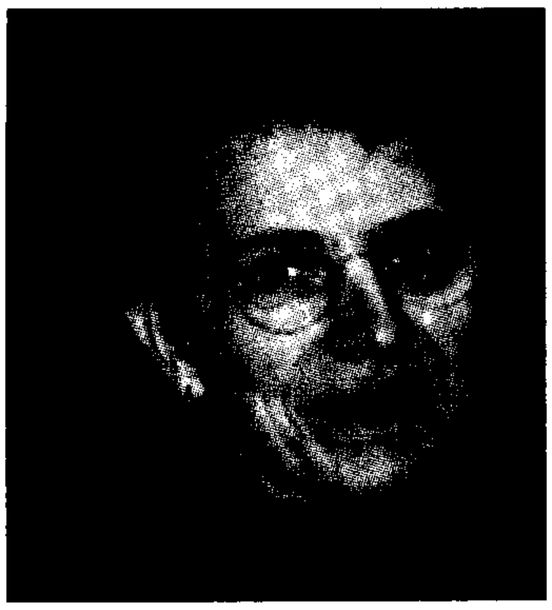
"We are very worried that whoever has taken them might return them to the BBC, thus allowing the Corporation to film them," said an obviously worried Inspector Knacker.

"We are appealing to whoever has them to hide the scripts under his bed at the very least or preferably to burn them.

"In the hands of the *EastEnders* cast these scripts would be dangerously *(cont. p. 94)*

the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
LEE HUGHES IN JAIL...
MY GOD LEE, HOW ARE YOU COPING?
WELL THEY COOK ME MY MEALS, I'M ALLOWED A FEW HOURS EXERCISE A DAY...
...AND IT'S PRETTY EASY TO SCORE A FEW DRUGS
JUST LIKE PLAYING IN THE PREMIERSHIP THEN!
MORE OR LESS, BAR A FEW LESS CROOKS

DIARY



ON THE BEACH WITH MELANIE PHILLIPS

I look around the beach. I don't know whether to laugh or cry. What an extraordinary state of affairs we have here – and what an indictment of our increasingly foul, vicious and shallow society.

There can be nothing more grotesque than the sight of a child of barely five years of age permitted by our increasingly lax society to build a "sand-castle" on a British beach. And not only that, but that self-same child is encouraged to dress in nothing but a skimpy swimsuit.

Do that little girl's parents – do we as a society – really want to turn a blind eye to the extreme moral danger that lurks in every sand-castle?

The truth is that this semi-naked child is being brainwashed by our shallow and craven society into thinking that she can construct an entire building in a matter of minutes.

And what is she being encouraged to make that building from?

Bricks and mortar – with firm foundations?

No. Not a bit of it.

Just sand. Nothing but sand. Truly, it beggars belief.

Frankly, it makes you want to weep.

Have that child's parents never heard of the tide coming in?

Don't tell me her castle won't be destroyed the second that the sea washes over it.

And don't tell me that that little girl – led so callously into believing that engineering miracles can be achieved with a bucket and spade in a matter of minutes, and without any formal education in the basics of architecture – won't grow up shattered and disillusioned, a depressed drop-out, scrounging money off the taxpayer, her arms covered in scars and bruises from foul-mouthed tattoos and syringes chock-full of heroin, an unmarried teenager brimming with resentment at the Kafkaesque society we have created for ourselves.

Will she turn to prostitution, alcohol, serial killing and hard drugs as a substitute for any sense of purpose in life?

It is probably too early to say. But one thing is clear.

No-one could possibly live their life in a sand-castle – and it is wicked to pretend otherwise.

For one thing, a sand-castle is far too small for human habitation. And for another, all the rooms in a sand-castle are full of sand. Even if human beings were small enough to squeeze into it, they would choke to death seconds after entry – brutally asphyxiated as grains of sand pour into their nose, throat and lungs.

And what of Tony Blair? What of Harriet Harman? Do they care? Of course they don't. They are far too busy swanning off on their expensive foreign jaunts at the taxpayers' expense to spare a thought for the literally millions of ordinary Britons choking to death in ill-constructed sandcastles this summer.

Frankly, it makes you want to weep.

Sometimes you really have to rub your eyes at a world turned upside down.

It is by now recognised that ice lollies are responsible for the tragic breakdown of our society.

Just look at the statistics.

Twice as many ice lollies are sold today as were sold thirty years ago. And over the same period of time there has been a five-fold increase in teenage pregnancy and a three-fold increase in vicious murder involving illicit firearms.

Yet Tony Blair and his depraved Cabinet continue to allow ice lollies to be sold openly on our streets.

These days, it is considered perfectly acceptable for hooligans to urinate and vomit in the street, over the flower stall and from the upper tier in the opera house.

Old ladies are whistling the latest rap tunes as they knife each other to death in broad daylight.

Primary school children are trafficking hard-core porn videos to one-eyed asylum seekers in exchange for opium, killer bees, faulty condoms and casual sex.

Hard-bitten foreign terrorists high on Bacardi Breezers are leaping out from behind garden hedges and throttling much-loved family pets before committing suicide by hurling themselves any-old-how off public buildings.

Is this an Orwellian nightmare? No.

This is Britain 2004.

Frankly, it makes you want to weep.

Yet the pushing of ice-lollies by ruthless dealers bent on profit is sanctioned – even encouraged – by our increasingly corrupt government.

One thing is clear. We are talking about the end of civilisation as we know it.

But how have we let this sordid situation come about?

It starts with a sinister tune emanating from the top of an ice-cream van.

It continues with little children – many as young as four years of age – handing over cash to a man who unashamed styles himself "Mr Whippy".

And it ends with a nightmare dash to the emergency ward at the dead of night – only to find the one remaining bed, pre-smeared in graffitti, sleaze and discarded gum – is already taken by ruthless Islamic fundamentalists hell-bent on wreaking global destruction.

We are witnessing the tragic collapse of Britain. A country that was once home to the likes of Boudicca, Nelson, William Shakespeare and Winston Churchill is now left to wriggle under the iron boots of Michael Barrymore, Peter Sutcliffe, the feminist lobby and Big Brother's Jade Goody.

Frankly, it makes you want to weep.

And what of everyone lying pointlessly on their deckchairs on the beach this brutal, shallow and sexually debauched summer?

From where I am sitting, I can see only too well that their deckchairs are sliding deeper and deeper into the moral mire.

Obese and sordid li-los. Sexually fixated swimsuits brazenly displaying explicit flesh far above knee-level. Spiritually empty rubber-rings forcibly placed around depraved toddlers. A horrifying increase in vicious, wholly unregulated kites with the inevitable strings attached. People openly swimming and sunbathing and indulging in excess of every kind.

No. This is not a scene by Hieronymous Bosch. It is Britain today – and it beggars belief.

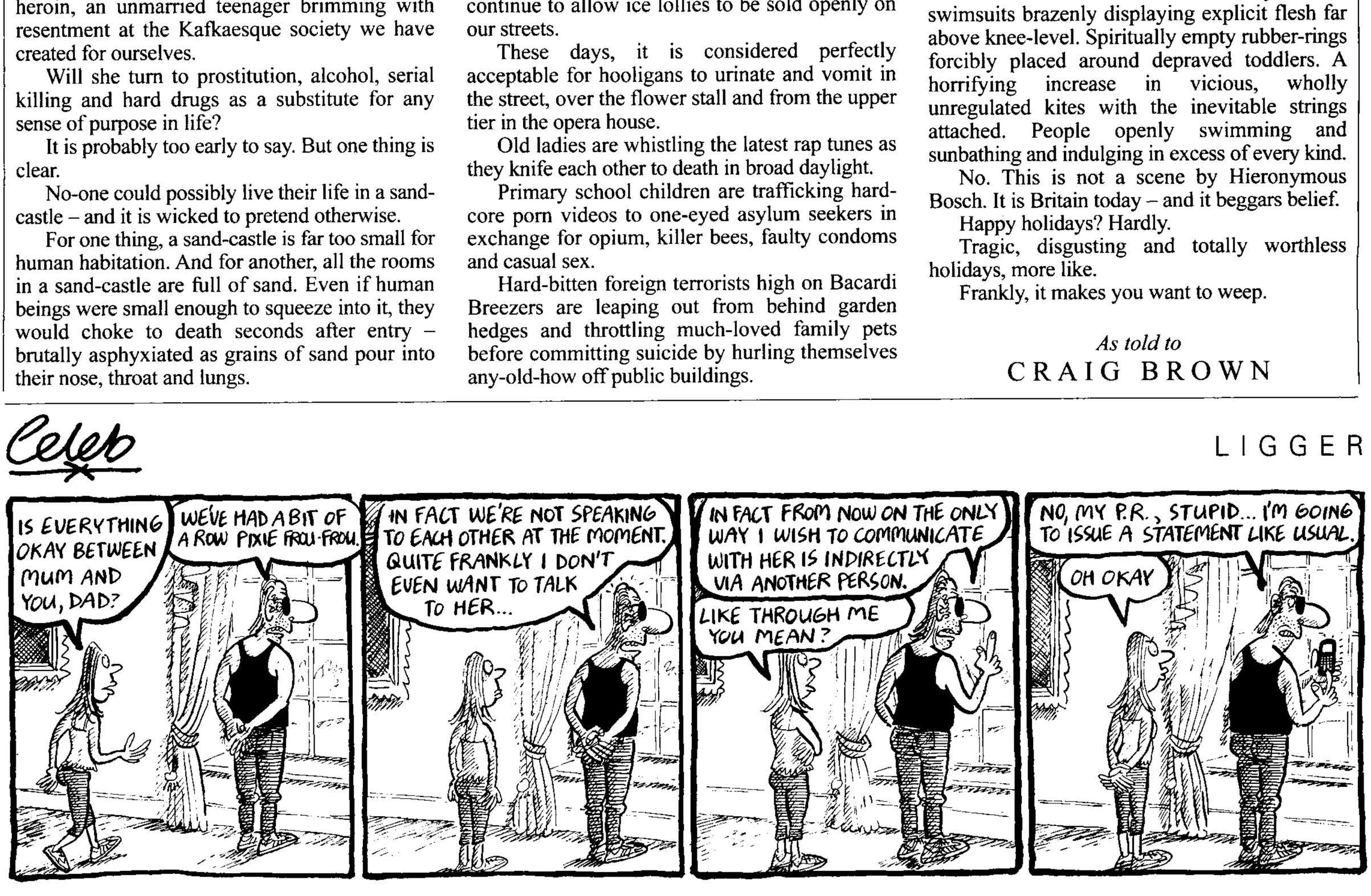
Happy holidays? Hardly.

Tragic, disgusting and totally worthless holidays, more like.

Frankly, it makes you want to weep.

As told to

CRAIG BROWN


IS EVERYTHING OKAY BETWEEN MUM AND YOU, DAD?
WE'VE HAD A BIT OF A ROW PIXIE FROU-FROU.
IN FACT WE'RE NOT SPEAKING TO EACH OTHER AT THE MOMENT. QUITE FRANKLY I DON'T EVEN WANT TO TALK TO HER...
IN FACT FROM NOW ON THE ONLY WAY I WISH TO COMMUNICATE WITH HER IS INDIRECTLY VIA ANOTHER PERSON.
LIKE THROUGH ME YOU MEAN?
NO, MY P.R., STUPID... I'M GOING TO ISSUE A STATEMENT LIKE USUAL.
OH OKAY

Literary Review

The food's too rich

You Are What You Eat
Dr Gillian McKeith
(Michael Joseph, £12.99)

Not on the Label
Felicity Lawrence
(Penguin, £7.99)

TWO MORE books this week aim to revolutionize our miserable lives. Gillian McKeith wants to make us physically and mentally healthier, while Felicity Lawrence is after a sort of moral colonic irrigation. Because few of us would like to be more miserable, less healthy and avowedly unethical, both books have become bestsellers, with McKeith's contribution given the lucky leg-up of a Channel 4 TV series.

In the case of the good doctor, she is not so much offering to change your life as insisting that you do so. No doubt her overbearing persona, prone to hyperbole and pock-marked with exclamation marks, has been made artificially dislikeable to suit the current TV climate, but on the page she comes across as more irritating than haemorrhoids (although these can be cured, natch, with a spot of bilberry and some yarrow ointment.)

McKeith's florid insistence that her way is "correct" and everyone else is wrong – bad science, she repeatedly calls it – has inevitably prompted several less rich, more eminent nutritionists to question her own bad science. "Her theories on food combining are perfect rubbish," said a professor of complimentary medicine at Exeter University. The British Dietetic Association agreed: "We're concerned. Some of the things she says just aren't true." The hacks have also been digging. The week before last the *Sun* revealed McKeith has no medical background. The title of doctor, they said, refers to a "worthless PhD in holistic nutrition gained via a postal course at a backwater US college."

When challenged McKeith's management (a certain Max Clifford) said her false claim to have a PhD from the American College of Nutrition was an isolated, accidental error; it was blamed on an unfortunate, nameless intern. The *Guardian* responded, noting with glee that the "isolated" incident had been repeated on her *Living Food for Health* book.

So there is plenty to suggest that pronouncements like "Do much of what I tell you most of the time, and you will surely be healthier, fitter, stronger, sexier and happier", should be taken with a sizeable pinch of unrefined salt, and that's before we even get to the book.

Its central assertion is that healthy food makes you healthy. Gillian will be the judge of what exactly is healthy food, and you'd better believe her because she has made several burger-boshing bloaters on the telly, thinner... by making them stop eating burgers. In their place she offers her own "Diet of Abundance", a pot pourri of esoteric roots, herbs and algae which you won't find in Lidl but you *will* find on Gillian's website in her own Living Food range. That there are so many references to her TV series to pad out the lists and recipes is the final insult – in the old days, "books" like this were six pages long and came free if you called a number given out after the programme. They were called factsheets.

Felicity Lawrence's book is an altogether more serious enterprise, and she is entitled to feel a mite peeved at being lumped in with a phoney physician. McKeith's book will prove to be as lastingly important as the 2003 Argos catalogue. Lawrence's is a serious, sustained investigation that only really fails because it never quite summons the courage to say what its author is plainly implying: that Tesco's and Sainsbury's are doing as much if not more harm to Britons and Britain than climate change, Osama bin Laden and 'flu put together.

The argument that underlies her polemic is well worn: the supermarkets are crippling producers in a bid to offer grasping consumers ever-lower prices. This in turn sustains illegal itinerant workforces and leads to suppliers indulging in dodgy practices to cut costs. But the examples she uncovers, including beef in chicken, e. coli in salad and enough preservatives in ready meals to give Gillian McKeith a coronary (which she would treat with flax oil and a yam) are nonetheless overwhelming.

In fact so convincing are they that you will henceforth avoid hypermarkets like open sewers. And there's the rub. The combined effect of reading Gillian McKeith followed by Felicity Lawrence is that you will only ever shop at the health food store or your to-die-for deli. That's all very well for *bien pensant Guardian* readers and those who can afford to buy McKeith's special supplements, but it's of little use to the people who most suffer from the problems both of these books address: the poor.

Britain's worst eaters are invariably the worse-off. McKeith studiously avoids discussing either the price or the availability of the superfoods she recommends to stay alive. Lawrence does eventually get to the problem of how to try to get people to spend more money on decent food, but ends up conceding that you need to shop more often than before. For people who lead convenience lives snacking in convenience stores, suggesting they get out more and splash the cash is whistling in the wind.

She notes that "we spend a much lower proportion of our income on feeding ourselves than previous generations" before tacitly conceding that the "we" she is addressing does not include the poorest fifth of the population. They still spend around a third of their income on food, much as they did in the 1930s. They have neither the inclination nor the time – nor, crucially, the money – to follow the shopping principles of the happy, healthy, wealthy families such as the Lawrences or the McKeiths. And if they've spent £20 buying these two books to learn that, they have even less.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

The Da Vinci Code
Dan Brown
(Corgi)

Chapter 94

"Don't you see?" explained the good-looking Harvard professor of Symbology to the beautiful French police cryptologist. "If we can solve the riddle we can find out the true meaning of all this."

They looked at the ancient text again hoping to find the four letter word concealed in the enigmatic poem which would open the secret door to Leonardo Da Vinci's bank account:

"Bishop to the ancients
But changed to Hebrew
Lose the old knights
And there's your clue."

"Hang on", said the queeny old English art historian who was there as well for some reason, "I've got it."

The others turned to him in awe. "Don't you remember the old aramaic word for bishop, 'Toshiba', which were written in Hebrew script loses the last letter a?"

"Yes", said the Harvard professor suddenly getting the idea. "And 'ib' looks like the mystical figure 16, which was the number of Merovingian knights protecting the original Holy Grail who were killed by Pope Incredible the Seventh in 1242."

"Yes", chimed in the sexy French police officer, "so if you remove the 'ib' and the 'a' from 'Toshiba' you get 'Tosh'."

"Which is exactly what this is

(cont. p. 994)

NEW VERMEER DISCOVERED

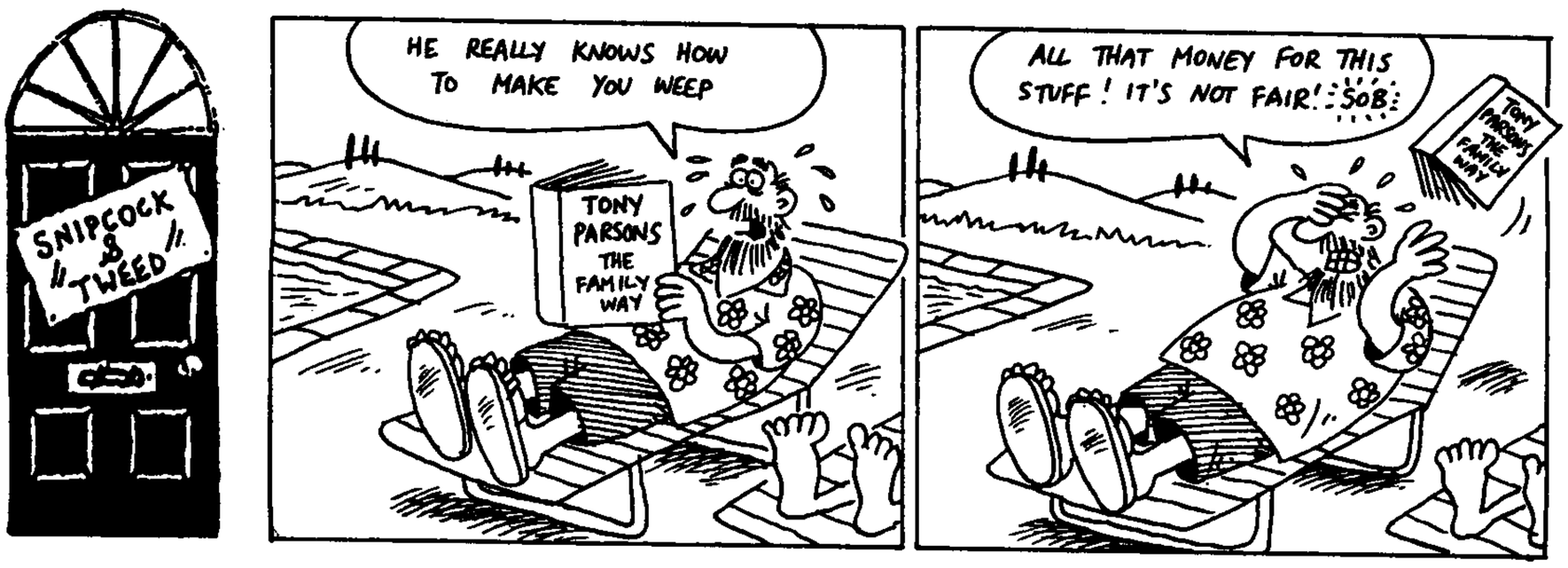
The Girl With The Big Hoop Earring

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ THE third volume of Jeffrey Archer's Prison Diaries – Dantesquely titled *Heaven* – concludes with a list of his insider recommendations to the home secretary as to how prisons should be reformed.

"If these recommendations were to be taken up, I would feel that my two years in prison were not entirely without purpose," writes the lying lord. The traditional "retribution, redemption and rehabilitation" are obviously not an option for Jeff!

■ THE *Mail on Sunday*'s review of Adam Macqueen's biography of William Lever, *The King of Sunlight*, gave an enthusiastic account of the soap magnate and philanthropist's


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
HE REALLY KNOWS HOW TO MAKE YOU WEEP
TONY PARSONS THE FAMILY WAY
ALL THAT MONEY FOR THIS STUFF! IT'S NOT FAIR! SOB
TONY PARSONS THE FAMILY WAY

achievements, with Jonathan Myerson declaring "no other biography in recent years has left me so desperately wanting to meet its subject."

But what did the paper make of the chapter concerning Lever's epic libel victory over the *Daily Mail* in 1907, which resulted in one of the biggest payouts by a newspaper in history and an abject and grovelling apology from Lord Northcliffe?

Er, nothing. Apparently Lever was simply "happy to organise a price-fixing cartel, until the *Daily Mail* exposed it."

■ WHILE most reviewers enjoyed Louise Welsh's fictional account of the last days of Chistopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine Must Die*, Alan Wall in the *Guardian* was scathing, dismissing it as "buccaneering tosh" and claiming "its one blessing is that it is mercifully short".

Could his vitriol be in any way related to the failure of his own rather more cerebral re-imagining of Marlowe's world, *The School of Night*, to set the world alight two years ago? While Welsh's debut *The Cutting* Room topped the best-seller lists, Wall's book sold less than 1,000 copies.

■ BACK in 2000 the US arm of Penguin published a book called *Katie.com*. Written by an American author called Katherine Tarbox, it told the story of how, at the age of 13, she was groomed and molested by a paedophile after meeting him in an internet chat room.

This was a story that needed to be told; but there was a problem with the project: the web address in the title belonged to neither Penguin nor the author (who owned www.katiet.com), but to a British IT consultant called Katie Jones, who has owned it since 1997 (and who coincidentally also runs a perfectly respectable chat-room site).

Jones was soon besieged by emails meant for Tarbox, some supportive, some abusive, some pornographic. The publisher was at first dismissive of Jones's justifiable complaints, which was insulting enough, but then moves began to wrest the Katie.com domain name from Jones without compensation. The publisher denies involvement, but what is certain is that at the end of last month, Jones received a communication from a "rather aggressive lawyer" acting for Tarbox. "She informed me that things would 'only get worse' for me from here if I didn't do something about it – ie give it to them," says Jones on her website.

Despite the unpleasant threat, Jones refused to give in and within a week, Penguin had posted a press release on its website, stating that the publisher was renaming the book *A Girl's Life Online*, which is what Jones has wanted all along.

First Drafts

Gabriel Garcia Marquez

■ FERVENT capitalist Martin Taylor, former chief executive of Barclays Bank, has become a man of the people in his role as chairman of WH Smith's pension scheme.

The fund has a deficit of more than £200m and Taylor is naturally anxious to ensure that none of the company's pensioners are left without their retirement income. This is why he has just boldly used his trustee powers to see off an attempt by private equity firm Permira to take over the struggling newsagent and bookseller. The deal would have seen the new owners saddled with enormous debts, putting the company at risk of a bankruptcy that would have left present and future pensioners high and dry.

While modestly declining plaudits for his actions, Taylor mused: "Since being a trustee, I have come to realise that pension deficits are effectively unpaid wages." What he failed to mention was the cause of the WH Smith deficit. Throughout the 1990s the company took a pensions contributions holiday (while its staff of course continued to cough up for the scheme). Or, to use Taylor's language, it failed to pay wages for many years, relying instead on the stock market bubble to meet its liabilities.

One WH Smith board member from 1993 who was responsible for this, and who became chairman of the company from 1999 to 2003 as the bubble burst and the pension fund deficit ballooned was, er, Martin Taylor.

'Bookworm'

REMAINDERS OF THE DAY

■ *MARRIED Alive* by Julie Burchill was first published in 1999 and the Orion paperback originally cost £6.99. It is now available in most branches of the discount chain Poundstretcher for £1.

O·B·N

Dressed head to toe in black, as always, and drinking white wine, he [Harold Pinter] sits at his desk, an unforgettable presence with his growling baritone, eyes that can penetrate granite and melt hearts, the profile of a Roman emperor and a mind with a laser-precise control of language. Playwright, poet, actor, cricketer, polemicist, human rights activist, he is now, at 73, the Grand Old Man of English Letters.

GEORDIE GREIG, Tatler
Submitted by J. James

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

RIP Brian Bagnall cartoonist, illustrator of Literary Review and the Dear Bill series (left). 1921-2004

Pseuds Corner

No coach, no caddie, no family, no friends. Just a man, his putter, and half a dozen balls, struggling to rediscover his touch. It was a mesmerising sight, but also a painful one, like watching Michaelangelo trying to remember how to draw a perfect circle.

RICHARD WILLIAMS watches Tiger Woods practising his putting,
Guardian

In the evenings, my companion and I love to pop open a bottle of the local plonk and translate poetry in and out of whichever classical language we currently favour, so I imagine we'll find room in the suitcase for Michael Sokoloff's Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period (Johns Hopkins University Press).

HARI KUNZRU's holiday reading,
Guardian

The Euclidean path integral over all topologically trivial metrics can be done by time slicing and so is unitary when analytically continued to the Lorentzian. On the other hand, the path integral over all topologically non-trivial metrics is asymptotically independent of the initial state. Thus the total path integral is unitary and information is not lost in the formation and evaporation of black holes. The way the information gets out seems to be that a true event horizon never forms, just an apparent horizon.

PROFESSOR STEPHEN HAWKING on 'The information paradox for black holes', BBC website

"I started camping four years ago, taking my dad's old tent. I decided pretty promptly that I was far too high-rent for a two-man triangle, though. In the past year or so people like me realised you can get a tent you can stand up in and it's completely transformed the scene... I have a bedroom-come-cocktail lounge, with inflatable furniture. I drape the roof with these wonderful printed fabrics from north Africa and we sit around drinking rum with freshly squeezed clementines. I'd forgotten to bring a juicer, but luckily another camper had one to hand."

LARA COLENSO ('The smart set camp it up'), *Sunday Times*

[DJ Tim] Westwood ran his heavily modified Jeep for several years, although he now says that was a mistake. 'I'd got stuck in a rut, but in this game you've got to keep moving. You have one hot summer with a car, then you've got to move on. I just didn't understand the competitive element and the creativity of the game.'

Daily Telegraph motoring pages

Beaches are giant blank spaces, washed clean every day, on to which all sorts of hopes are projected. But they do not transcend politics – in fact, they represent a third way between market and state.

CHARLES LEADBEATER
Prospect

Pseuds Corporate

BT's Vision: Connecting your world. Completely

BT's Customer Promise: We make every experience simple and complete.

BT's Values: Trustworthy. Helpful. Inspiring. Straightforward. Heart.

New BT email sign-off

CONTRIBUTORS: Michael Solan, Dave Shennan, James Raymond, Cristina Cona,Ben Sheppard, Phil Woolas M.P., Angus Silvie.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

NIGER FORGERIES

CLUTCHING AT STRAWS

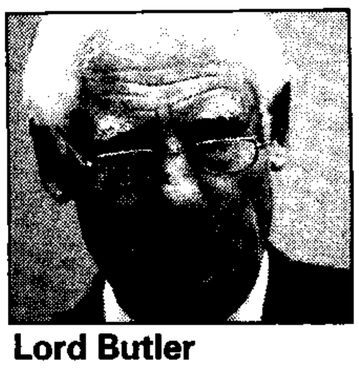
THE case for war in Iraq may have more holes than a vegetable colander, but the government has found a new way to deal with awkward questions about the "Niger forgeries": don't answer them.

Dr Lynne Jones, Labour MP for Birmingham Selly Oak, has pressed the government repeatedly over the claim that Saddam Hussein tried to buy uranium from Niger. After publication of the Butler report, however, foreign secretary Jack Straw simply stopped answering her questions.

Dr Lynne Jones

The Butler report did not clear up why Tony Blair insisted on claiming that Saddam had sought Niger uranium when the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) said that the assertion was only based on forged papers. Instead Butler spread the confusion; and Blair's evidence for sticking to his Niger claims now looks desperately thin.

According to Butler, there was circumstantial evidence that an Iraqi ambassador had visited Niger in 1999 but "the purpose of the visit was not immediately known." As Niger exports uranium, and because of "other evidence of Iraq seeking to restart its nuclear programme", Britain's joint intelligence committee (JIC) apparently judged that Iraq wanted to buy uranium ore. However, Butler's report also says that in 2001: "The JIC cautioned that, on Iraq's nuclear programme: 'We have no clear intelligence'."



Lord Butler

Butler's report describes at length the IAEA's own investigation, noting that it had "no indication that Iraq attempted to import uranium since 1990". The international body thoroughly investigated the 1999 visit of ambassador Al Zahawie to Niger, but had "not obtained any other related information than the forged documents" backing the British claims.

Bizarrely Butler records this damning evidence from the IAEA but makes no comment on it. Instead he claims Britain was *not* misled by the Niger forgeries because "the forged documents were not available to the British government at the time its assessment was made, and so the fact of the forgery does not undermine it".

While Britain may not have had access to the forgeries themselves, they had been in circulation for some time: French, Italian and American intelligence were all aware of the documents. It seems the British evidence included a *summary* of the forgeries supplied by one of these agencies. This, then, is actually worse than Butler says: the British government was relying on not firsthand but secondhand accounts of forgeries!

In September 2003 the Commons intelligence and security committee made this clearer. According to its report, the security services had three bits of evidence. The spies told the committee they had "two independent sources, one of which was based on documentary evidence. One had reported in June 2002 and the other in September that the Iraqis had expressed interest in purchasing, as it had done before, uranium from Niger".

In addition "GCHQ also had some sigint [signals intelligence] concerning a visit by an Iraqi official to Niger". However, the spies said that the IAEA's February 2003 exposure of the Niger forgeries "did not affect its judgement of its second source and consequently the SIS continues to believe that the Iraqis were attempting to negotiate the purchase of uranium from Niger."

This strongly suggests that the exposure of the Niger forgeries did affect the intelligence services' judgement of their *first* source: they realised that this first source, quite probably a report from a foreign intelligence service like Italy, France or the US, was in turn based on the Iraq forgeries.

And what of that second source, received by the intelligence services in September 2002? Answering a question from Lynne Jones, foreign minister Bill Rammell said this information also came from a foreign government. Rammell told Dr Jones that he could not pass this information on to the IAEA because it "came from the intelligence service of another government".

This January Jack Straw told Dr Jones that "the government asked the originators of the intelligence" to "discuss the issue with the International Atomic Energy Agency". Better still, "the government understand this was done" before the war. So had the second piece of information convinced the IAEA that Saddam had sought uranium? Dr Jones asked the IAEA. Its spokesman replied that it had heard nothing to change its conclusion to the UN security council on 7 March 2003 that the uranium claims were solely based on forged documents.

So, not only did Blair's second piece of information fail to convince the IAEA, it also seemed to be based on those same forged documents. This only leaves the "sigint" from GCHQ to prop up Blair's Niger story. Both the Butler report and the intelligence and security committee report suggest this sigint may simply refer to the visit by Iraq's ambassador to Niger and make no reference to uranium.

Dr Jones thought the easiest way to judge would be to ask whether this "sigint" too was passed to the IAEA. She asked Jack Straw in July. He refused to answer. Dr Jones has now submitted an early-day motion protesting at Straw's refusal. It has attracted 36 MPs' signatures.

Barmy army

THE four notorious deaths at Deepcut barracks in Surrey are not the only mysteries of their kind in army ranks.

Private David Shipley, 20, of the Royal Logistics Corps, died in 18 inches of water at Gutersloh army camp in Germany in June 2002, barely 60 yards from where a group of fellow soldiers were drinking. He had arrived at the camp only three days earlier from Deepcut.

Shipley was one of a squad clearing up in the evening after an *It's a Knockout*-style event at a royal golden jubilee celebration in the camp. There was horseplay: he and other soldiers were thrown in the shallow pool and he later had a boot full of water tipped over his head while drinking beer.

Shipley apparently wandered off shortly afterwards, saying he intended to take a shower. Forty minutes later was found face down in the pool. No witness saw what happened and no splashing was heard. Even more mysteriously, the post mortem examination did not provide conclusive evidence that death was caused by drowning.

With controversy still surrounding the four Deepcut deaths (all from gunshot wounds), one might expect the army to do everything in its power to ensure events at the German base are properly investigated. But an inquest into his Private Shipley's death has been adjourned by the Barrow-in-Furness coroner because the evidence was insufficient to proceed.

Two key witnesses did not attend. They were the sergeant who was in charge of the clean-up group and who was said to have been one of those who had thrown Shipley in the pool. He is now believed to be in Belize. The other was a man who ran a snack caravan and was clearing up near the pool at the time of the death.

Moreover, the limited recollections of some of the army witnesses who did attend – "I don't recall", "I didn't see" – so infuriated William Bache, the Shipley family's solicitor (who also represents two of the Deepcut families), he asked them if they had been coached.

Although there was evidence Shipley had been teased about a speech impediment at Deepcut, his parents, Peter and Jenny, are convinced he was happy and doing well in the army. The testimony of his fellow-soldiers suggested he was not drunk and showed no sign of being seriously upset about the duckings he received – which makes his death even more curious. Perhaps more light will be shone on events when the inquest resumes.

Byter bit

THE GOVERNMENT's disastrous flirtation with computerisation and the private sector continues.

Having failed to learn the lessons of hastily introducing costly untested computer systems (cf Crams, criminal records, passports, student loans, child support, tax credits, see *Eyes passim ad nauseam*), workers at the Medical Research Council's flagship research institute in Cambridge are the latest in the firing line.

The MRC decided to introduce a new computerised purchasing system, called FAMIS Enterprise Buyer Professional (EBP), for the test-tubes, chemicals, radioactive materials and other sensitive stuff used by scientists at the prestigious Laboratory of Molecular Biology, home to a host of Nobel laureates.

Designed more for paperclips than for specialised scientific equipment, there was nothing "professional" about the package purchased from the London and Amsterdam-based LogicaCMG. It was, according to one scientist at the lab, "catastrophically ineffective".

Lucky scientists who managed to place orders, between crashes, faults and logging-on problems, could rest assured that the materials would never arrive because purchasing experts could not access the orders from the other side. On the rare occasions both ends of the system worked, the orders were still wrong because, for example, the system was unable to distinguish between measures – thus a 20lb order for chemicals ended up as a 2,000lbs order.

Three months down the line the system has been withdrawn for further "testing" and replaced with a temporary order system, which looks remarkably similar to the original order books (used hassle-free since before anyone can remember).

DNAccountancy

Despite condemnation from police, lawyers and scientists, not to mention widespread concern among Labour backbenchers, the government is pressing ahead with plans to flog off the sensitive and lucrative Forensic Science Service, a world leader in DNA analysis and involved in 90 percent of police forensic work in Britain.

The business case for the sale was put together by PricewaterhouseCoopers, one of the "Big Four" accountants, which no doubt had access to much sensitive FFS material. What a coincidence then that PWC has just announced that it is to open a new electronic forensic laboratory in Birmingham to specialise in hi-tech fraud crime!

While there is no doubt this is a new area of forensic expertise as the old paper trail for uncovering corporate fraud has been replaced by computers, mobiles and other electronic records, hi-tech crime is one of the FSS's specialist areas. Ripe for selling off to PWC no doubt.

PFI NEWS

INVISIBLE STINK

WHEN a company such as Enron or Equitable Life is found fiddling its accounts, resignations and disciplinary action usually follow. But how will similar offences by government bodies, now revealed in a report to parliament, be treated?

The government's accountancy adviser, the financial reporting advisory board (FRAB), recently submitted its 2003/04 report to the Commons' public accounts committee (PAC). It contains the startling revelation that scores of private finance initiative (PFI) projects have been incorrectly kept off the public sector balance sheet. The effect of this is to take the financial commitments for these new buildings, in some cases hundreds of millions of pounds, out of the government's books, massively understating public sector borrowing.

In many cases, in order to attract tax relief available only for off-balance sheet expenditure, the assets don't appear in the private sector PFI company's accounts either. This accountancy vanishing act prompted the FRAB to comment that "the board is particularly concerned by this 'off-off' accounting treatment".

Without mentioning individual cases, the FRAB concluded: "Initial investigation by the treasury and national audit office suggested that the public sector inconsistencies stem from a belief that the assets must be treated as off balance sheet by the public sector if the project is to proceed." In English this means that public bodies have been falsely accounting for PFI projects because they think that they won't get their new school or hospital if they don't.

The FRAB was not impressed and felt obliged to restate the most basic rule of honest accountancy: "The Board… stresses that the accounting treatment of individual PFI projects should reflect the reality of the situation."

The *Eye* has already revealed two major PFI hospitals that feature on neither public nor private sector balance sheets: the Norfolk and Norwich (capital value £158m) and the Queen Elizabeth in Woolwich (£118m). The FRAB report shows that, of 25 health and local authority schemes it looked at, 20 were enjoying the "off-off" accounting trick. True to the secretive tradition of PFI, however, the identities of the projects are not divulged.

The public accounts committee is likely to take a dim view of an accounting scandal right at the heart of the chancellor's cherished PFI programme. Among the many questions it is likely to ask might be: which PFI projects have been falsely accounted for by the government? By how much has government borrowing been understated as a result? Will government accounts be correctly restated? Why did those preparing the false accounts feel under such pressure to do so?

HOW PRIVATISATION WORKS

ONE way to save money on grounds maintenance under a private finance initiative project is, of course, not to do the maintenance work.

Hence the state of the "lawn" at Durham House (see photo), a department of work and pensions (DWP) office in Washington, Tyne and Wear. Or should that be jungle?

Not that it apparently matters much. The word inside the building is that there hasn't been much action on the window-cleaning front either, so no one can actually see the lawn clearly. Like much of the DWP's estate, Durham House is operated by Newcastle Estate Partnership, a consortium headed by giant contractor AMEC, under a 25-year construction and management PFI contract.

Let us pay

JUST before Easter last year schools minister David Miliband set up PfCS, Partnerships for Church of England Schools, a commercial arrangement between the department for education, the National Society for Promoting Religious Education and Partnerships UK (the government's privatised private finance initiative cheerleader). The plan was for PfCS to negotiate PFI deals for £250m worth of Church of England schools across the country, to be paid for over the next 20 years or so.

But Miliband should have known that the money lenders tend to get thrown out of the temple, so the omens for mixing PFI and religious establishments were never that good. And so it came to pass that… last month the project was scrapped.

More than a year after PfCS was launched and large amounts of public money had been spent on it, the treasury pointed out a slight snag: as charities, CofE schools are not allowed to sign PFI contracts in the first place. The schools will now be built and paid for in the traditional way, God willing.

All in a Noble cause

THE Scottish Executive is learning the true cost of private finance initiatives as it hands millions in public subsidy straight into the pockets of the investment bank which funded a new terminal for the state-owned Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd (HIAL) service.

Noble Group funded the new £10m terminal at Inverness in a PFI in 1998. Nearly a million customers passed through the HIAL facilities in the last year; and under the PFI contract (surely one of the dumbest ever devised) HIAL must pay a fixed £3 charge to Noble for every passenger who passes through the airport.

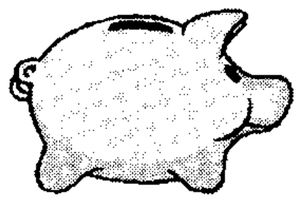
It's a pretty easy to calculate that Noble is getting a very good return on its investment. But HIAL itself describes the PFI contract as "burdensome" and has as a result had to drastically reduce the amount per passenger earned from the airlines in order to entice more low cost airlines to provide routes which are useful to the highlanders.

Last year HIAL received £23.7m in public subsidy. Shouldn't the Scottish Executive do the sums and just buy out Noble?

LOOT! by 'Bruin'

at Vodafone

Share options granted per person last year...



£3,660,000
...in the boardroom

£980
...around the rest of the company

Blacklist grey area

TWO YEARS after the giant engineering firm Acres International was convicted of gross corruption in one of southern Africa's poorest countries, the World Bank has finally blacklisted it (see *Eyes passim*).

Acres has been banned from bidding for any World Bank projects for three years after being convicted of bribery in multi-billion dollar dam projects, partly financed by the bank, in Lesotho.

This is the first time the World Bank has debarred such a big company and it may serve as a warning to other multinationals and big consultancies, including Britain's Balfour Beatty and Alexander Gibb, involved in the Lesotho scandal. Two other companies, one German and one French, have so far been convicted.

But those trying to clean up business in the tiny African nation (pop: 2m) should not celebrate too soon. Canada-based Acres has not yet bothered to pay in full the 15 million rand (US$2.5m) fine imposed on it by the Lesotho courts (so far it has contemptuously stumped up less than half), even though the World Bank has in recent years awarded Acres four other contracts in Africa and the Middle East worth about US$2.5m.

Moreover, these contracts were awarded while investigations into Acres activities were continuing. A World Bank spokesman said: "The reason they received this work is that the Bank adheres to the principle of innocent until proven otherwise." For which read "innocent in the bank's eyes only": three of the contracts were awarded after Acres' conviction in September 2002.

So while it is business as usual for Acres (the Canadian government will not sanction the company) Lesotho is again left alone in its anti-corruption battle. Not only is it continuing largely without the promised help of other countries, including Britain, to pursue the other bent companies, but it must now pursue Acres through the courts for non-payment. No wonder the view in Lesotho, southern Africa and elsewhere is that the interests of the developed world lie more in protecting the interests of its own companies.

YOUTH DETENTION

Too young to die

IF ANYTHING good thing can result from last week's suicide of 14-year-old Adam Rickwood at Hassockfield secure training centre near Consett (he was the youngest child to die in custody so far), it is that the parliamentary human rights committee will now focus on the way Britain locks up record numbers of children.

Adam was the second boy to die at the centre: Gareth Myatt, 15, died there after being forcibly restrained.

The last *Eye* reported how home secretary David Blunkett has ignored the complaints of a coroner, MPs and the church over the "suffering and injustice meted out" to young people in trouble with the law, following the death in custody of 16-year-old Philip Scholes.

Eye readers will also be aware that all this was meant to change more than a decade ago when the then Tory government pledged to reform juvenile detention after a spate of youth deaths.

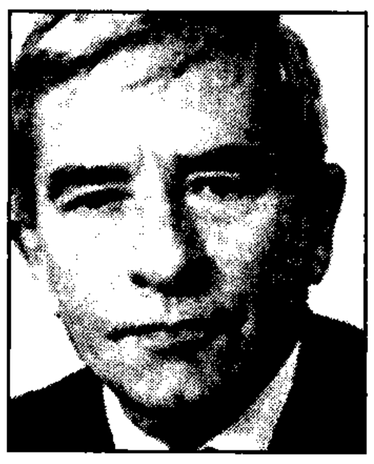
But the Youth Justice Board has failed in its duties to ensure that custody is only a last resort for child offenders and that the highest standards are maintained in institutions taking children. Instead Britain now locks up more and more young people, often far from their homes and in jails and institutions that cannot cope with their extreme difficulties. Blunkett's response is simply to build more.

In The Back continued over

TALE OF TWO INQUIRIES

THE US commission investigating the 9/11 attacks in New York examined the circumstances leading up to more than 3,000 deaths, not to mention the inner workings of intelligence organisations around the world, Al Qaeda, the Bush administration and the US military. The commission still managed to issue numerous interim papers, held televised public hearings and, after 18 months, published a favourably received paperback report.

Meanwhile in Sleepy Hollow, the cavernous but not exactly packed Londonderry Guildhall, Lord Saville of Newdigate's endless Bloody Sunday inquiry has been rolling its collective trouser legs up for the summer holidays.



Lord Saville

With not a single staff writer for any British or southern Irish daily newspaper still covering the hearings, and interest outside the chamber all but dead, Saville might have wanted to get a move on – especially since he's already missed so many deadlines over the past six and a half years. But not a bit of it. Instead, on 16 June he announced that hearings would resume on 4 October, an adjournment of just 110 days. Then on 6 August, a little noticed press release was slipped out announcing that the inquiry would now resume even later, on 22 November.

Saville's inquiry was set up by Tony Blair in 1998 and, theoretically, should have taken far less time than the 9/11 investigation. But of course that takes no account of the superior forensic skills of our highly-paid British barristers, who obviously need a few years longer than their American counterparts to examine all the evidence. Counsel to the inquiry Christopher Clarke QC has been working on a concluding submission to be considered by Saville and his two baffled-looking Commonwealth co-judges. But why is he bothering? At the 16 June session he explained that: "Above all I wish to make it plain that the document that is to be produced will not be a summary of all the evidence, will not represent any view of the tribunal, will not enjoy any special status and insofar as it contains suggestions or observations, will be such that the tribunal will be free to accept or disregard it according to its views of the matter." Anyone wondering what the point of preparing it is obviously hasn't been to law school.

The inquiry already clocks off every day at 2.30pm, works only Monday to Thursday and enjoys interminably long holidays. So why the further delay from October to November in resuming this shamefully long-winded exercise? The delay apparently stems from Clarke's decision, taken since the adjournment, to write down everything and hand out photocopies rather than get to his feet and read the entire submission into the record. Instead he'll simply make a closing speech presenting edited highlights over a couple of days rather than the fortnight originally envisaged. Then the other barristers can start arguing over it ahead of the judicial reviews which are certain to be brought when Saville & Co finally report late next year or in 2006.

Given the cost so far (£155m and climbing) and that none of the interested parties can agree on what actually happened on that fateful day in Londonderry all those years ago, never mind how to prove it, there is no chance Saville will come up with a final report to satisfy anybody.

NUCLEAR NEWS

Safe in their hands

NEW faces for nukes with the appointment by energy minister Stephen Timms of new chairs for both the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) and the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA).

The NDA, responsible for a "new accelerated clean up regime", will be headed by Sir Anthony Cleaver, whose efforts to clean up begin with the £80,000 salary he will receive for two days work a week.

Sir Anthony Cleaver

A former Tory party favourite, Cleaver was made chairman of the Atomic Energy Authority in 1993 with a mission to privatise as much as possible. His creation of a new privatised wing, AEA Technology, was strongly criticised by the national audit office. Not that this stopped shares in the new company from soaring in value, or Cleaver himself being appointed as chairman of – yes, you've guessed it, AEA Technology.

In 1998 AEA was fined £101,000 by the health and safety executive after the irradiation of three workers at Dounray, and was heavily criticised for allowing its drive for "contractorisation" (*surely privatisation? Ed*) to leave it "not in control nor in a position to understand the safety significance of the contractors' activity." The HSE concluded that both the management and technical base had been so weakened that AEA "was not in a position to tackle its principal mission – which was decommissioning."

Sure enough, two years later AEA Technology bailed out of decommissioning and radioactive waste altogether, with Cleaver declaring that "nuclear is a mature market and we do not see opportunities for significant growth as we do elsewhere. It is not a vote of no confidence, just a realistic response to what has been happening over the last few years."

Meanwhile back at the Atomic Energy Authority itself, Lady Barbara Judge is taking over Cleaver's old job (a mere £60,000 for two days a week). While Judge, who will be chiefly concerned with the decontamination and closure of nuclear sites, has no experience in the atomic field, Timms declared that her "wealth of experience in managing change and setting fresh business strategies… will help the UKAEA realise its potential to compete for the future environmental restoration of its sites."

Lady Barbara Judge

That experience includes ten years as a director of Friends Provident, six of them as deputy chairman. In that time the life insurer was fined £450,000 by the Personal Investment Authority for mis-selling pensions, and £675,000 by the Financial Services Authority for its failure to deal properly with complaints about the mis-selling which arose, according to the FSA , from "systemic weakness in the firm's procedures".

Who can doubt that the nuclear clean-up is safe in their hands?

ENERGY NEWS

Windy thinking

WHEN the Conservatives called for a "rethink" on renewable energy and shadow environment secretary Tim Yeo asked: "Why are we not doing more to harness power from wave and tide?", it took the biscuit. The answer is that the Conservative government destroyed all hope for renewables back in the 1980s.

Nigel Lawson, who was energy secretary for a brief unhappy period, and the usual minions – David Mellor, Norman Lamont and Michael Spicer – produced thousands of words explaining why renewable energy was not a good idea.

In the 1970s governments (first Labour then the Conservative) panicked because it looked as if Middle Eastern oil producers were going to stop oil supplies to the west. Instead, the Arab nations put up the price but continued the supply; and new oilfields were discovered in the North Sea and Alaska. Once they came on stream, the government lost interest in investing the large sums that would be needed for renewables to make a serious contribution.

The easiest, oldest and most tested method would be tidal power. Sir Hermann Bondi, chief scientist, was appointed to investigate a tidal barrage on the River Severn. He produced a favourable report, as did all the others who had done the same job since 1925. Sir Hermann said he had "worked against the clock" to finish it quickly. He need not have hurried. His report is still in the files, ignored for more than 20 years. Meanwhile the French have been taking "free" tidal energy from the River Rance in Brittany.

As to wave energy, Britain played a key role in researching a novel method of generating electricity. Salter's Duck won worldwide enthusiasm. But the major investment has never been available. The Tory governments made repeated excuses to avoid spending money on it – to the delight of the nuclear and oil lobbies.

The present government has ignored the tides and made some friendly gestures towards wave power. But it has never even hinted at spending the amount needed to build wave power stations in the deep sea, the size of ocean liners. Neither side in fact has a good record and they have left Britain with a bill of £48bn to clear up the radioactive mess and no credible energy policy.

The argument now centres on wind energy and the Tories are increasingly sympathetic to local protests against wind farms on land. The British Wind Energy Association meanwhile has changed its policy and is now supporting wave and tidal energy as well as wind power.

For now, the debate is full of hot air and there is no sign of either party confronting the issue of investment in what will have to be largescale projects costing billions. There will probably be no serious movement… until the lights go out.

● *RIP, David Ross, journalist and author, 1925-2004, who wrote this last piece for the* Eye *before he died last week.*

Good News

PIERS BOLDUC, a young man with Asperger syndrome wrongly incarcerated in Broadmoor because he was incorrectly diagnosed as schizophrenic, has finally been released.

After years of protest by his desperate parents, 28-year-old Piers has at last been found a place at The Hayes, a special centre in Bristol for those with Aspergers, a condition at the high-achieving end of the autism spectrum.

Even though it took nine years of lobbying, Piers may be one of the lucky ones. There are 21 others with Aspergers held in Britain's three special secure hospitals and many more inappropriately detained, diagnosed and sectioned under the mental health act because of lack of specialist centres. Some like Piers, whose case was recently highlighted in the *Eye*, have been given powerful anti-psychotic drugs after their misdiagnosis.

In the City

THE mysterious death of business analyst Richard Chang, who fell from the fifth floor of Abbey National's London headquarters last month, has raised a number of potentially embarrassing and possibly expensive questions for both the bank and corporate investigators Kroll Associates.

Chang, an IT risk management specialist, died in an apparent suicide on 13 July less than an hour after requesting a break from an unfinished interrogation by two Kroll operatives carrying out an investigation into the source of a lengthy, anonymous letter sent to chief executive Luqman Arnold and others earlier.

The letter, several pages long, made a series of allegations, including favouritism and possible corruption, largely involving the awarding of consultancy contracts by Abbey National, currently being wooed by Spanish suitor Banco Santander with an £8bn bid. The letter is understood to have named a number of senior executives. Whether Chang – who was already leaving Abbey National to join Bank of Scotland – was the author of the letter remains uncertain. It is understood he consistently denied this suggestion when questioned by Kroll. But it is suggested that a note from Chang admitting his role was found later. If so, this is expected to be produced at the adjourned inquest.

Friends of Chang, a British Chinese, say he was concerned about various recent developments inside Abbey which may have motivated him to become a whistleblower. They deny he was a crank, unstable or malicious. They and his family currently remain unconvinced – despite the apparent circumstances of his death – that he committed suicide.

Among the matters raised by Chang is said to have been a large consultancy contract awarded last year by Abbey to the City-based Buttonwood Tree Group to restructure its treasury operations. The respected Buttonwood Tree works for a stellar list of City banking groups. Treasury services were to be streamlined as part of Arnold's strategy for reviving the ailing Abbey.

The so-called Basil Project resulted in considerable upheaval at Abbey and much internal unhappiness. Some staff had suggested there were close business and personal links between certain senior Abbey and Buttonwood Tree executives.Such suggestions are believed to have been dismissed as completely unfounded and malicious by the internal investigation carried out by company secretary Karen Fortunato and totally denied by those involved at Abbey and Buttonwood Tree.

Richard Chang's death – he leaves behind a wife and two young children – shocked his family and colleagues. They say he was looking forward to his new job, had shown no signs of stress and had been making holiday arrangements. News of his death also rocked Abbey National and Kroll, who both deny responsibility for it. The bank is said to have immediately contacted his wife to offer assistance. She has retained a solicitor to examine the facts surrounding her husband's death and to negotiate any financial settlement. Chang was just 48 and thought to be earning a high five-figure salary.

Kroll was so concerned it circulated staff with an internal email explaining that there had been an unfortunate incident involving an unnamed client following the interview.

The two Kroll operatives, one a former Scotland Yard fraud squad detective superintendent, have given statements to Yard detectives who are carrying out an investigation for the St Pancras coroner. A tape of the Chang interview is believed to have been handed to the police. The two men are expected to be called as witnesses at the inquest at which it is assumed the anonymous letter may also be produced.

After Abbey carried out an internal investigation into the allegations and decided they were completely unfounded and that all the contracts had been awarded properly, it informed staff of the hunt for the author of the anonymous letter. A threat of prosecution was indicated if the source was identified.

Kroll initially produced a list of up to 14 potential suspects. From this eight were to be interviewed. It is believed Richard Chang was perhaps the first. Friends say he was invited into the office on a pretext and was not expecting to be interviewed over the letter that day. That is a standard investigation technique. Other suspects have also since been interviewed and a manager is said to have been suspended.

The interview with Chang is said to have been routinely and legitimately tough but not angry. Apart from denying responsibility for the letter, he is said to have given no hint of being unnerved or distressed. However, the content and impact of the interview and whether the Abbey employee was put under pressure to confess is likely to be the focus of the inquest to establish whether he may have taken his own life while the balance of his mind was disturbed by what happened during that questioning. Such a finding could be legally significant for both Abbey National, his employer who invited him to the interview, and for Kroll whose employees carried out the questioning.

Richard Chang's death is one more blow for Abbey National, which is struggling to shake off its "shabby Abbey" nickname. It is also one more piece of bad news this year for Kroll. It may still have an operative in a Brazilian jail over a spying scandal and an arrest warrant is outstanding for another. In Switzerland, it was embroiled in allegations of surveillance and attempted bank account access involving a Swiss lawyer heading an arbitration panel. And the 40,000 potential victims of the Federal-Mogul/Turner & Newall pension fund crisis accuse its administrators of charging "fat cat" fees over the many millions paid to administer the UK companies and advise on the US parent's planned emergence from Chapter 11 proceedings, leaving British pensioners behind.

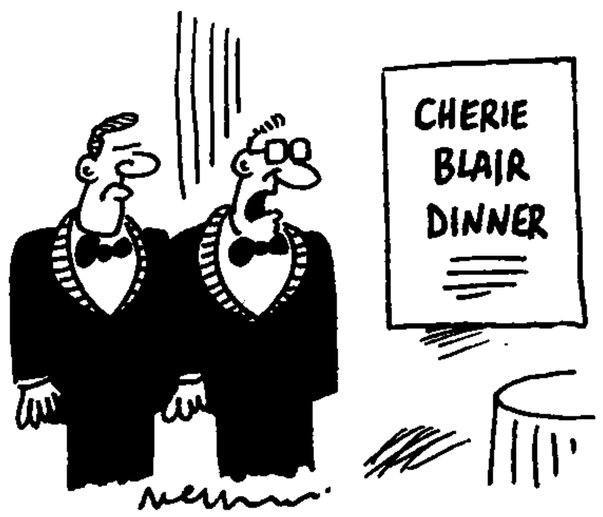
THE anonymous allegations of financial misconduct that sparked the Abbey National witch-hunt, which ended in the apparent suicide of an employee, were not the first the bank has faced of late.

Fining the bank £2m for breaking money-laundering rules last December, the financial services authority (FSA) said Abbey showed a "marked lack of regard for its regulatory obligations".

Besides the £2m fine, the FSA also docked Abbey National Asset Managers Ltd £320,000 for systems and control breaches. The FSA said both cases reflected wider control failings, including inadequate monitoring of key regulatory risks, across the Abbey National group over a prolonged period.

SOME 18 months since it was created the Accountancy Investigation & Discipline Board (AIDB) has its first case.

Supposed new get-tough bean counter-basher Cameron Scott is going to make life hell for the auditors of bus maker Mayflower Corporation (director John Major) which collapsed spectacularly earlier this year. This must have been an unpleasant duty for AIDB member Stuart McKee of PricewaterhouseCoopers. PwC, along with now dead Arthur Andersen (again) were Mayflower's auditors for the period 2000 to 2003, the accounts for which are now very much in question. But as he is a corporate finance partner and not an auditor, no doubt there was no conflict of interest.



"It's waffle followed by lolly"

Last month's annual Serious Farce Office report produced predictable if justified criticism that in a year the SFO barely managed to convict 50 percent of those it prosecuted at trial: 26 out of 48. And of that 26 only 11 convictions were obtained from jury verdicts. That compared with 22 acquittals either by a jury or even earlier by the trial judge.

But since the new SFO year began in April, the picture is much worse. Seven convictions have been dwarfed by a staggering 16 acquittals. Because most of the cases are low profile, the scale of this failure has not received the publicity

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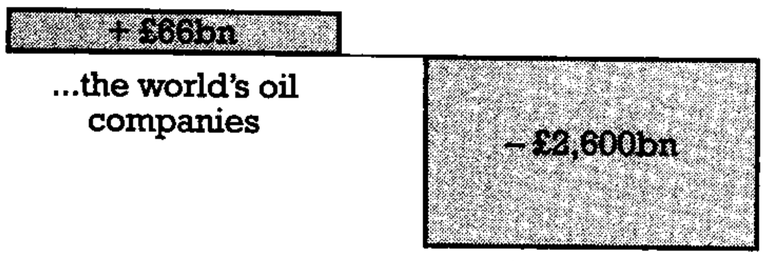


it deserved. The Seriously Flawed chorus is reserved for failures such as the Wickes trial in 2002 and Andrew Regan last year.

SFO cases now take almost twice as long to get into court, never mind trial, than was considered acceptable when the office was created in 1988. Yet when trials take place, the results are worse. Over the last three years the success rate has steadily fallen. Originally the aim was to have suspects charged within a year. Now investigations drag on for nearer two years. SFO chief Robert Wardle accepts that this is unacceptable.

Offices of the Orb group, largely run by convicted pension thief Gerald Smith, were raided in December 2002 over £33m spirited away from Izodia by Smith and his crew. There are still no charges. Imperial Consolidated collapsed over two years ago leaving investors around the globe short of $250m. Charges are still awaited – as they are in the more than two-year, £400m NHS over-charging investigation.

But even after suspects are charged the inevitable legal jousting and manoeuvring usually dictated by defence lawyers adds a further year or more before any trial starts. Consider the case of Roddam Twiss, the SFO's most recent success when convicted last month of a $2.2m advance fee fraud.

Roddam from Sodom, an old *Eye* favourite as a serial S&M as well as fraud offender, became an SFO target six years ago. He was charged three years ago. The trial began in May this year. Much of this delay was due to the international nature of the fraud, Twiss' tactics and a year wasted extraditing his co-defendant who then was found too ill to stand trial!

The trial of four accountants involved in Powerscreen International and Matbro, which collapsed in May, had begun in 1998 with charges brought three years later. Rulings by the trial judge over the failure to retain or produce sufficient evidence forced charges to be dropped. The case against the five Curnow Shipping defendants, thrown out by the judge at half time in April, had begun a mere three years before.

An advance fee fraud case against five defendants, mostly solicitors, begun five years ago, finally collapsed in July after one of the defendants was revealed as a registered police informer due to the incompetence of the SFO prosecution team!

The 2005 annual report is already looking distinctly like a hearty meal for the SFO's critics. Since April 2001, the SFO has managed to convict 60 but failed to convict 49 of those suits it has taken on. Hardly a reason for the guilty either to be deterred or plead guilty when caught.

Compare this with the record of Dubya's Corporate Fraud Task Force set up in July 2002 in the wake of the Enron and WorldCom scandals. The taskforce pulls together not just the FBI and federal regulators for the securities and commodity markets, but includes energy, pension and housing frauds. In two years it has charged more than 900 defendants and obtained more than 500 convictions or guilty pleas. Everyone at the top of the Enron food chain has been charged and 12 defendants have been already been convicted or pleaded guilty – mostly the latter.

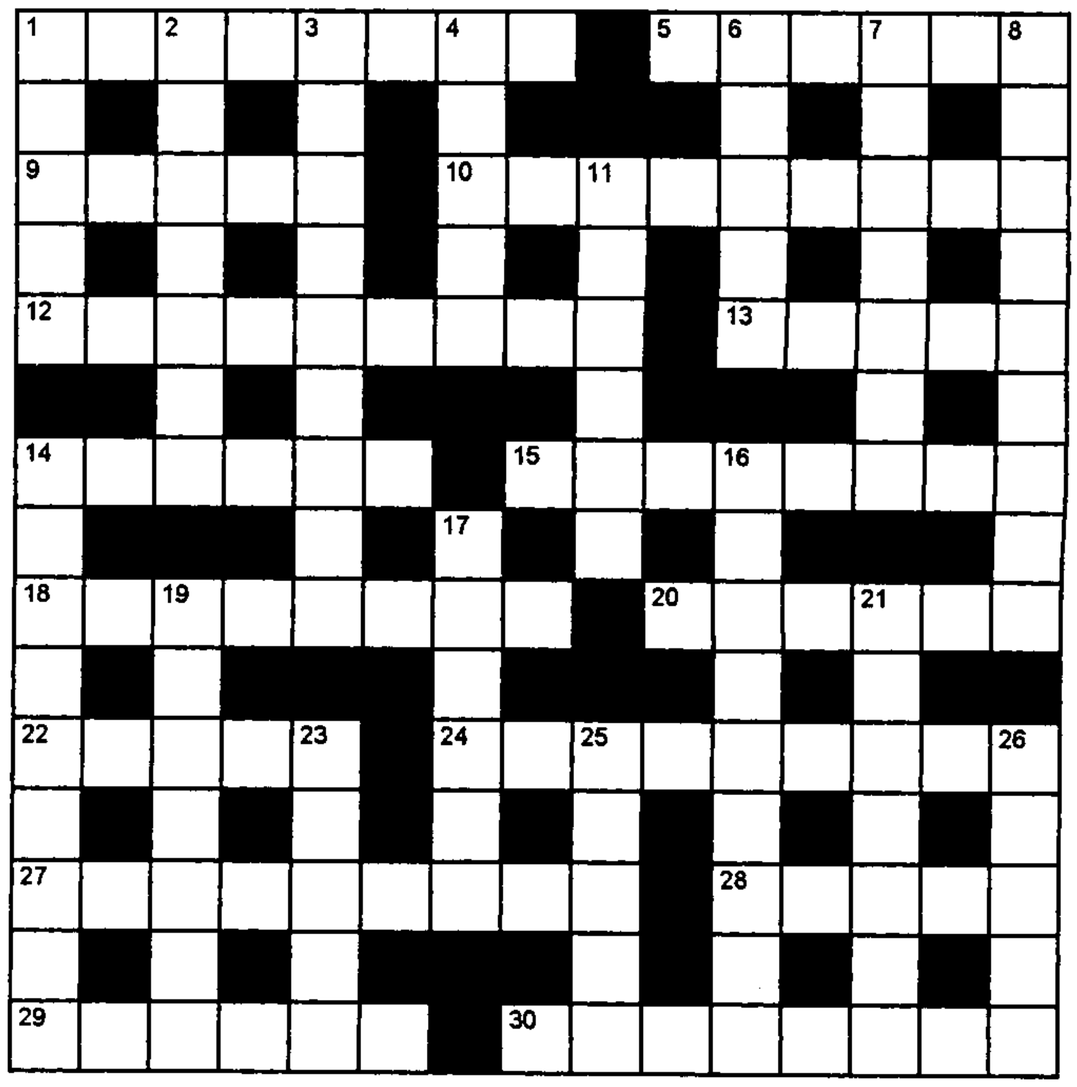
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 268

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 26 August 2004.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Spillage container attached to tits – not good, economy-wise, in the long run? (4-4)
5 "Bet Dubya's pissed off with Tony's beginning and end" smear (6)
9 Up to the time when a contemptible type loses head (one left) (5)
10 Brenda rejected by slapper gobbling chap – it causes a delay (9)
12 Iris's snuggled up to Welshman's pole (9)
13 Tiger's tongue in *pasta Milanese* (5)
14/20 Just the niche for what's pretentious unprocessed crap, right? (6,6)
15 Jordan appears to be fixing vote: happy Prince goes (3,5)
18 Ready to expose member, end up dithering about Vaz's last sanctimonious U-turn (8)
20 See 14ac.
22 Rank stars penetrated by male solicitors (5)
24 One with invalid charge about US topless knickers (9)
27 Brad snapped "Brenda an anxious type" (9)
28 Come see Cyclops in the money (5)
29 Wanker's capital changed Kipper (6)
30 Possibly waste of Robin's time, his messing around with Tony's head (4,4)

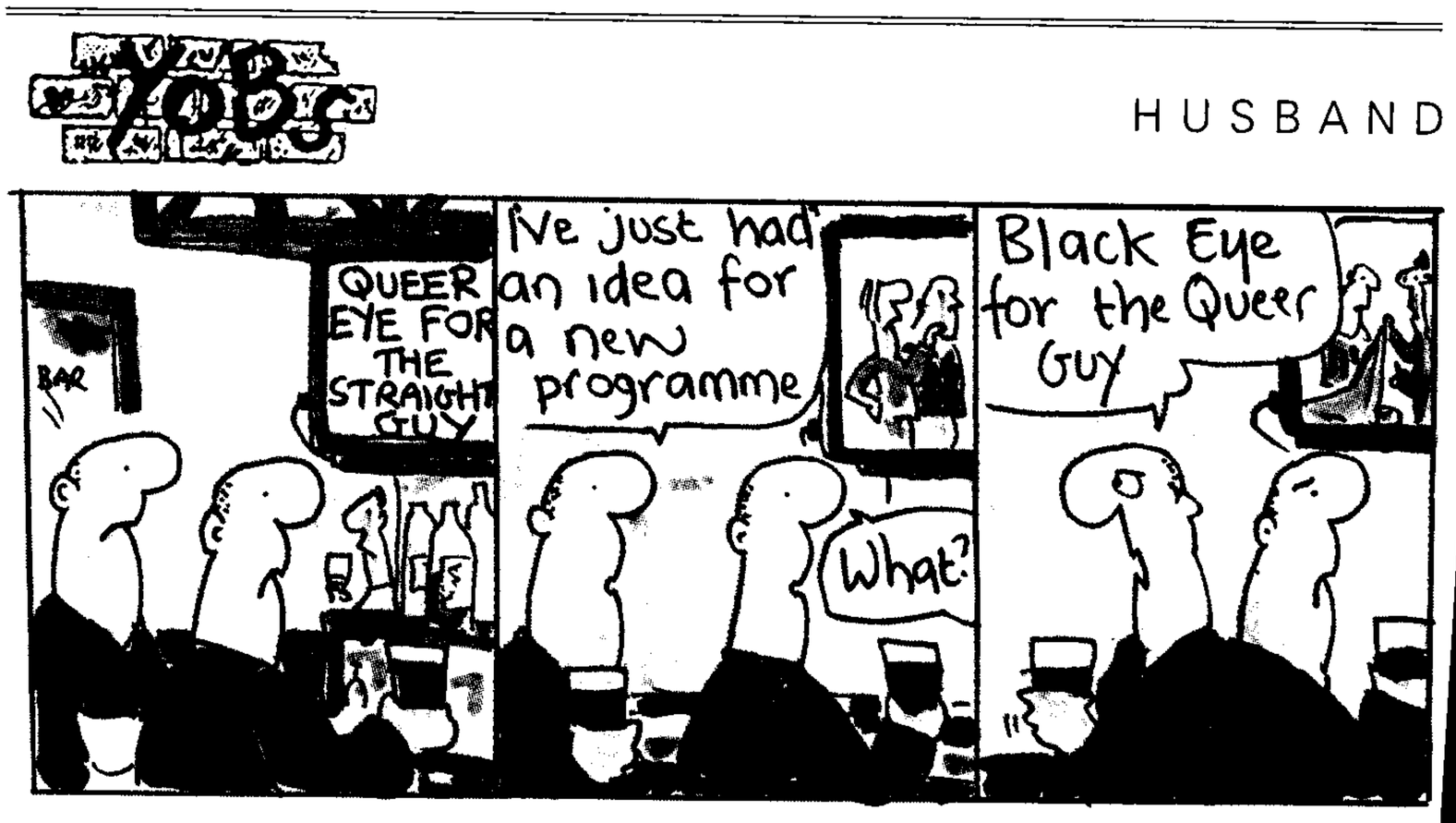
DOWN

1 Not much of a Cliff fan? There's a sizeable number inside! (5)
2 *Abroad with Nick* – it didn't reach our screens (3-4)
3 Failed utterly as a term for how pre-pubescent boys should be tackled? (7,2)
4 Country's brought back broadcasts about "Tony's end" (5)
6 Bird's inside leg retroflexed (5)
7 One repeatedly has way with Woody's ex. – no problem for the red-blooded sort? (7)
8 How Trigger might be described? Hardly a film star (3,6)
11 Tone upset about Florida's description of politician to whom blame never seems to stick (6)
14 Choice writer journo puffed up (9)
16 Does "love honk" explosively, looking like Punch? (4-5)
17 How to get round being wealthy? (6)
19 Mob size determined by stupid types (7)
21 Hank's out to stifle spirit of ex-President (7)
23 Has the wherewithal to remove top (black) (5)
25 Just look at that soldier, one of several sniffing round Brenda (5)
26 He's set to be buggered when the sailors get in (5)

Crossword 267 winner: ALAN WATT

ACROSS: 6/4 Phew What a Scorcher 8 Crowd 10 Solve 11 Lager lout 12 Black Rod 13 Thighs 16 Shock-horror 20 Parody 21 Knob joke 23 Wonderbra 26 Nazis 27 Decor 28 Neophilia.

DOWN: 1 Hell-raiser 2 Ballcocks 3/25 Gang bang 5/24 Polo neck 6 Pass by 7 Wreck 9 Detest 14 Gorgonzola 15 Porn baron 17 Old dears 18 Spewed 19 Red Sea 22 Bunch.



- Had a beer with my dad.

- Remembered the times we disagreed.
- The lectures about the hours I kept.
- The constant pressure to study.

- His many grey hairs.

- Thanked him for all of it.

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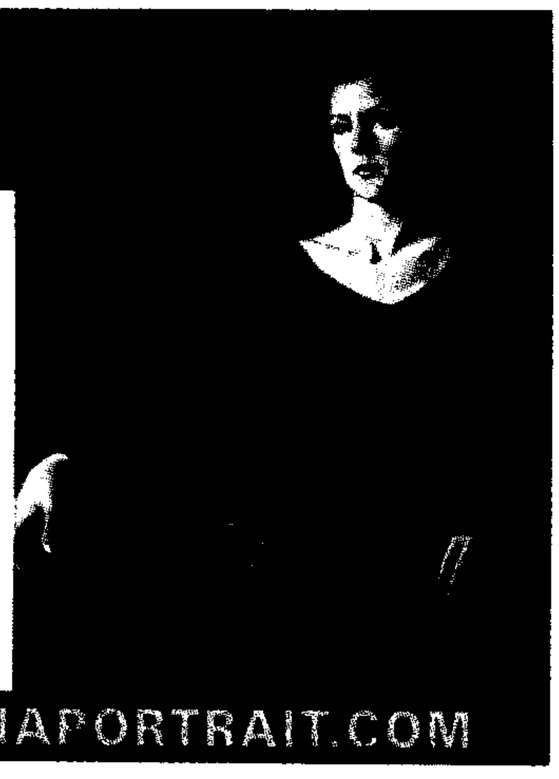

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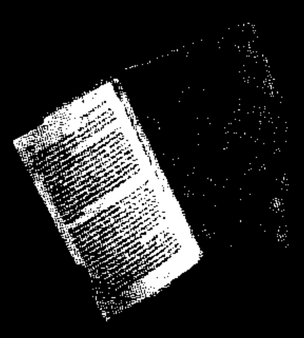

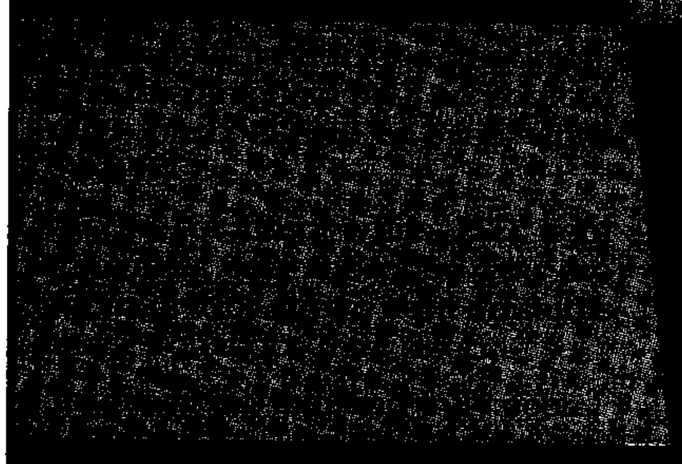

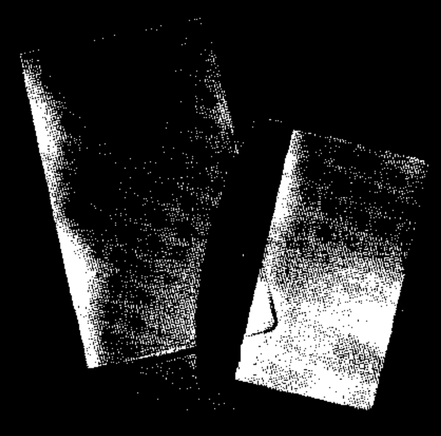

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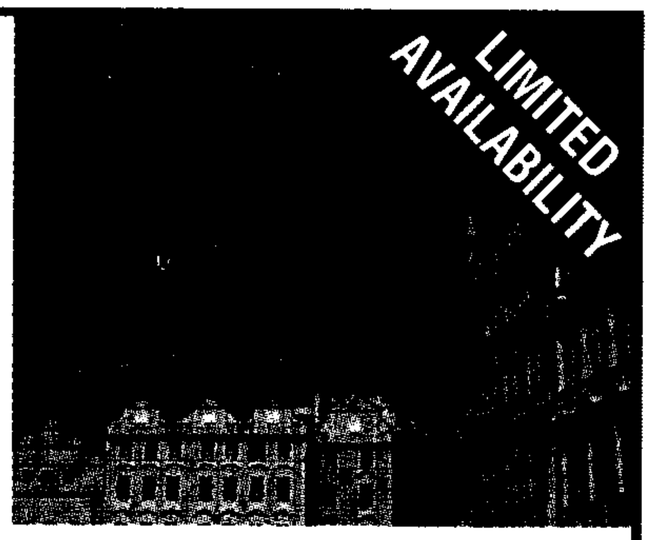

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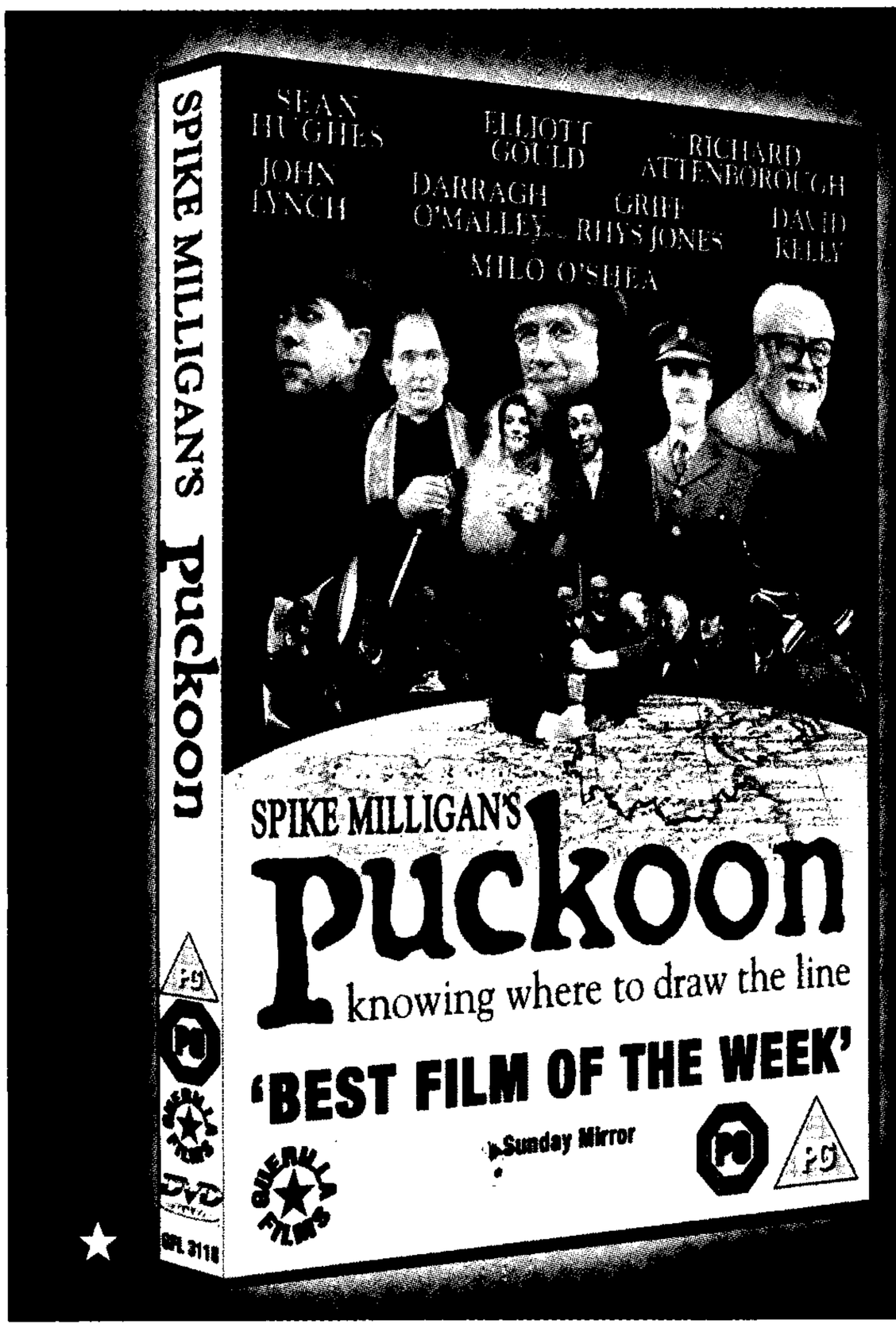

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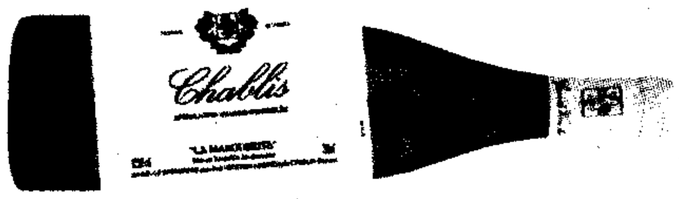

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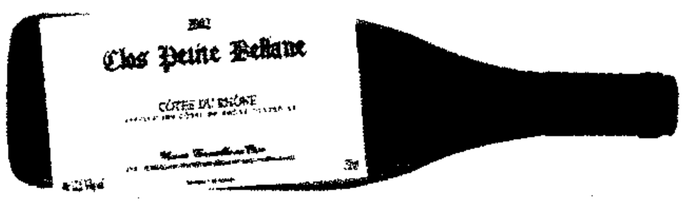

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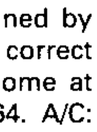

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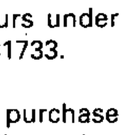

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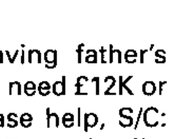

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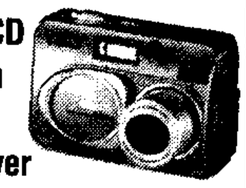

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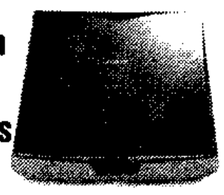

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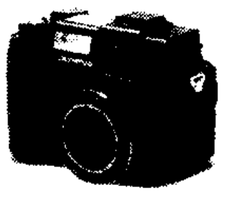

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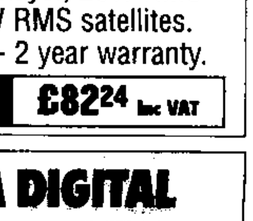

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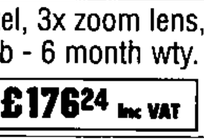

2.0 Megapixel
Compact design

1600 x 1200 dpi res, 3x optical zoom, macro mode & video capture facility. Grade A Nikon refurb - 6 month wty.

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CP 4300: 4 Megapixel, 3x zoom lens, Grade A Nikon refurb - 6 month wty.

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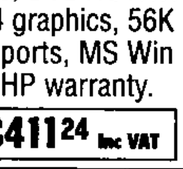
HP PAVILION A330

STOCK ROTATION



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HP DVD Re-writer
80GB hard drive
64MB nVidia video

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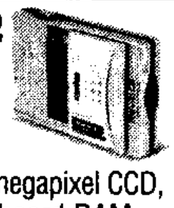
KONICA REVIO C2



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Only 13.5mm thin! 1.2 megapixel CCD, built-in flash, 14MB onboard RAM, movie clip capture. Brand new stock.

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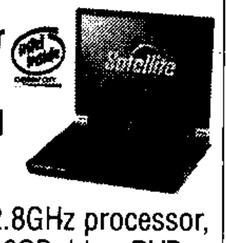
SATELLITE A40-702

TOSHIBA GRADE A STOCK



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DVD writer drive
256MB DDR RAM
15" TFT display

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